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SHORT STORIES

No. 751.] Week ending May 23rd, 1903. [Price One Penny.

HE RAISED HIS EYES AND SAW—PROJECTING THROUGH A HOLE IN THE BLANK WALL—A HAND AND ARM!

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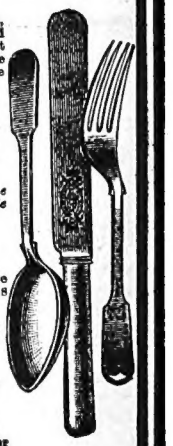

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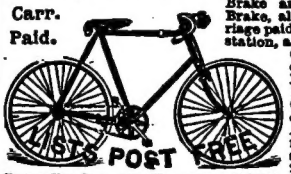

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SHORT STORIES

No. 751.] Week Ending May 23rd, 1903. [One Penny.

The Arm in the Wall.

The Story of a Strange Deliverance.

Containing the Incident depicted on the Cover.

"I can't take this, sir; it's bad!" said the landlady of the inn, her usually jolly face becoming very grave.

"Bad?" echoed Quinton Chalmers in surprise. He picked up the half-crown and looked at it doubtfully. "Do you mean to say that this is a counterfeit?"

"Certainly!" responded the landlady, unbending and looking sympathetic. She perceived that his astonishment was genuine, and that he was not knowingly uttering base coin. "There's a lot about, sir!"

"There's one too many about for me!" declared Quinton sorrowfully. "Misfortunes never come alone. I'm down on my luck, and, to make matters worse, half a crown out of the ten and six I possess proves to be spurious. Well, nail it to the counter!"

He tendered another coin in payment of the frugal meal which he had ordered, and departed.

"I am not against making money," he reflected, as he sauntered along, "but I wouldn't stoop to make it out of poor beggars like Quinton Chalmers! Yes, I remember; there has been an outcry about the amount of spurious money in circulation. H'm, I should like to have the pleasure of seeing the coiners in the dock, confound them! What's the next move?"

This last remark applied to his own movements; the answer was soon forthcoming.

"To Bilstone. I shall get there by the evening along these country roads and lanes. Put up there for the night, then search about for work."

In pursuance of this plan he pushed on for some time, meeting very few people, and absorbed in his own reflections. He pulled himself up suddenly and uttered an exclamation of wonder.

"Surely I must have been mistaken! Yet it seemed real enough as I lifted my eyes. Let me get a little nearer!"

He quickened his steps in the direction of a long, blank wall, probably the surrounding wall of a country mansion. He kept his eyes on one particular spot in the wall as he hurried towards it.

He was close to the spot now, and he waited for the reappearance of the object. Presently he saw something emerging from the apparently solid mass, and he involuntarily clenched his fist in his excitement. A hand projecting from the masonry! It moved, and there gradually appeared a bare arm! It raised itself and its fingers were ready to touch or clutch at something.

An uncanny sensation crept over Quinton's body, causing a tingling from his head to his feet. His eyes were fixed on this strange object, projecting from the long, high, blank wall, and he could not have moved to save his life. The spell was removed only when the arm shrank into the masonry, as it seemed, drawing the hand with it.

"Heavens!" gasped Quinton Chalmers, recovering the power of speech. "What is the meaning of that? I am not dreaming; it's real enough; but is it a warning or is someone imprisoned there?"

The easiest way to discover something of the truth was to clamber to the spot, where, as he could now see, a hole had been made in the wall. If some joke-loving individual were on the other side—— But no! How could a practical joker have been sure that he would see the arm when it first appeared, while Quinton was at a distance? It was not a difficult matter to reach that hole by digging his penknife into the mortar and making footholds. In two minutes he was on a level with the hole and was peering through.

It was no mere surrounding wall, with path or grass on the other side, for it was dark within and he could distinguish nothing. He was lifting himself up an inch or two higher, in his endeavour to get a better view, if possible, when he saw two gleaming eyes, and the next instant the arm was thrust out and the fingers gripped his throat in an iron clutch.

Quinton vainly tried to wriggle himself free; he could not retain his hold and yet do something to liberate himself, and it was that thought which suggested a successful device. He simply let go all hold, so that the whole weight of his body was thrown on the mysterious arm, dragging it against the jagged hole. Quinton fancied that he heard a cry, the grip was loosened, and he fell to the ground in a heap, fortunately with no more serious injury than a bruise or two.

"I'm going to get to the bottom of this!" muttered Quinton determinedly and angrily. "I must see what this means, and if anyone has been playing with me, why that someone is going to catch it!"

It was a fair climb, and a somewhat risky one, to reach the top of the wall, but Quinton essayed it with the help of his knife, and succeeded. He discovered that the wall formed, for a considerable length, one side of some irregular buildings, like sheds made of brick instead of planks.

At the spot where he had seen the arm the shed was higher than the rest, and possibly consisted of two storeys. From the top of the wall to the roof of that building was not much of a drop, so Quinton edged along the wall, schoolboy fashion, till he reached this shed and then let himself drop as gently as he could to the roof.

There were no skylights, but some small holes, about an inch in diameter, which reminded Quinton of the air-holes in the boxes used for conveying live creatures.

He lay flat on this sloping roof, his head lower than his body, and peered over the farther side in search of windows, but there were none in the shed. There was a door for giving admission to the ground floor.

"This is mysterious! Have they got a wild man of the woods in this box? I'll call in at the holes!"

He turned himself about, and placing his mouth against one of the air-holes, he cried, "Hallo!"

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Once more he thought he heard a cry. He placed his left ear flat over one hole and listened; he heard a cry which he recognised as "Help!"

Quinton's mind was made up immediately. This was not a private asylum, for no one would be allowed to keep lunatics confined in such a cage. There was foul play of some sort, and Quinton meant to unravel the mystery of the arm.

He saw that some slates could be removed, and he had them off in a very brief space of time. The opening thus made permitted more light to enter an apartment which had no other means of obtaining relief from its darkness and gloom.

"Nice place, that, to keep a human being!" muttered Quinton, as he thrust his head into the space and looked round. "Anyone there?" he called out. "Gracious!" he ejaculated hastily, drawing his head back. "What's that?"

He had at first taken the strange thing to be a wild animal, but as he surveyed it more closely he perceived that the creature was a human being.

It was a man, whose age it was not possible to guess with any degree of accuracy; his hair was long and hung about his shoulders like a mane, his beard and moustache were also long and unkempt, his eyebrows seemed at times to hide the small, frightened eyes. His face was brown and grimy.

Near him lay a ragged coat, which he had probably taken off in order to thrust his arm through the hole in the wall. If he wore a shirt, no part of it was visible now, and his arms were bare to the shoulder.

"Who are you, and why are you here?" queried Chalmers in bewilderment.

"So you have tracked me at last!" exclaimed the man submissively. "I thought I had killed you, long ago—I cannot remember how long, for I have lost count of the days and nights! Well, come in and take me! It will be a release from this place, at least! Then I did not kill you?"

"It isn't years ago," replied Chalmers easily, peering through the opening once more. "It isn't many minutes since you tried to throttle me! I say, I've come to help you! I'm coming down. No tricks, now!"

Reckless of the consequences, Quinton dropped through, feet first, and alighted on the floor close to the strange occupant of the prison, as the young man now called it. It was about twelve feet from the roof to the floor, so that it was not possible for the prisoner himself to get to the roof and escape, supposing that he desired to do so.

"Now!" said Quinton cheerfully. "What can I do for you? Tell me all about yourself."

"You are not afraid of me?" asked the man. "I tried to kill you years ago, you will remember! You know that I am Will Bristowe!"

"William Bristowe!" echoed Quinton, stepping back in surprise. "Ah, yes! I understand. You mistake me for my father, whom you struck in a quarrel five years ago. You disappeared, doubtless because you feared the arm of the law. But you didn't kill him, I am thankful to say, and he died of fever thirteen months ago. Do you understand?"

The man sat down on his rickety stool and passed his hand over his hairy face. He sat still, in deep reflection, for quite five minutes, but when he looked up at Quinton the young man saw the light of understanding in his eyes.

"Yes, I see it all now!" he said slowly. "I seem to have been dreaming. Then I am not a murderer, and my little girl—she must be a big girl now!—is not living under the stigma."

"My father tried to find you before he died, as he wished you to know that he felt that he had provoked you to the quarrel. Your daughter——"

"Tell me about her!" pleaded the man eagerly. "Millie was fourteen then. Where is she?"

"Oh—er—she's all right!" returned Quinton evasively. "But tell me about yourself. What have you been doing?"

"Making money!" laughed the man, and his laugh made Quinton's flesh creep. "Look!"

In the corner to which he pointed was a piece of sacking covering a heap. Bristowe threw aside the sacking, disclosing to the astonished gaze of the younger man a pile of new money—sovereigns, half sovereigns, and silver coins of all denominations. They were heaped together indiscriminately.

"Feel them!" cried Bristowe, with another hysterical laugh. "Catch!"

He dug his hands into the heap and threw the contents into the air just above Quinton, so that a golden and silvern shower fell about him.

"Money, all money!" laughed Bristowe. "Money for fools to get hold of—made on the premises. Ha, ha!"

"Stop it!" cried Quinton authoritatively. "Sit down and explain!"

The man was strange, but certainly not mad; probably he would become insane if left to brood over his supposed misdeed and confined in that prison. He seated himself as quietly as a child, and, after further urging, told his story in broad lines.

"So I did not kill him! Thank Heaven! I ran away, leaving my daughter to the mercy of strangers, because I feared the hangman's noose! My sole care was to hide! I secreted myself by day and travelled by night, eating what I could pick up on the roads, till I fainted by the wayside.

"When I came to, I was in a room. A man said to me: 'I know you! You are a die sinker and metal engraver; your name is Bristowe: you are the very man!' I begged him to save me, not to give me up for the murder. He listened to me; then he smiled and said he would help me to hide if I would help him.

"I agreed to do what he wanted if he would only save me. He brought me here by night, as the hunt was hot after me for murder, he said. Then I found that he wanted me to make dies for coining counterfeit money, and to help in touching up the coins after they had been taken from the moulds. I refused, but he threatened to hand me over to justice and I agreed."

"They deceived you!" cried Quinton. "They took advantage of your fears and your nervousness, and I've no doubt that they threatened to disgrace your daughter and all that sort of thing, so you fell into their trap. In reality, you had nothing to be afraid of. That man had seen you before, of course?"

"Yes," replied Bristowe sadly. "I made the dies and they coined the money. For a long time I worked, not in this room, and I cared nothing for the robbery in which I was assisting. Then I rebelled; they threatened me, but I said that I would face the charge.

"I was getting tired of it, my conscience would not let me rest. But they would not let me go! They kept me in this room, without light, neglected and with scanty food. Sometimes they beat me until I do some work here by the aid of a lamp!"

"The brutes!" cried Quinton indignantly. "Then you made a hole in the wall?"

"Yes, with a blunt knife, and I covered it artfully from inside! You would never detect where it is! I put my arm out as a signal when I think they will not see it. I saw you peering through there, and I thought that the dead had come to life. How you resemble your father! In an agony of terror, I clutched at your throat!"

"It was a tight grip!" exclaimed Quinton, feeling his throat. "Well, I should help you to get out in any case, but I have other incentives than pure humanity!" To himself he added: "How can I tell him now that I am in love with his daughter, but that I am too poor to ask her hand in marriage and that I have lost trace of her since leaving home? I wonder where she went to? Perhaps she will write to me and the letter will be sent on soon as I have an address!"

"You will never get me away from here," sighed Bristowe. "There is no door!"

"Then we will go through the roof!" was the prompt response. "But how do you get out if there is no door?"

"They move the floor!" returned Bristowe grimly.

"Move the floor! Well, we'll attend to those rascals later; I owe them something for that half-crown, for I'll be bound they made it! Now, I'll get on your shoulders and so spring up and grab at the woodwork and scramble through.

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You stand on that stool and make a spring for my hand, which I will hold down as far as I can. It will be a wrench, but I'm strong and I think we can manage to get you high enough to clutch the woodwork also. Stand here!"

Bristowe was all excitement. He trembled so violently that Quinton had to tell him to "brace up!" The young man got him in position and was soon in a kneeling attitude on Bristowe's shoulders. Another effort, and he was standing upright, ready to spring and relieve the trembling Bristowe of a weight that was making him shake.

"It's moving!" suddenly screamed Bristowe.

Quinton realised the situation when he felt Bristowe staggering. He made a tremendous effort and leapt towards the ceiling, but he was too late; the movement of the floor had upset Bristowe and taken him from the required position just a second before the leap was made. Quinton missed his mark and came down, face undermost, horizontally, and below him he saw, in a rapid glance, a spectacle that would have chilled the heart of the bravest.

The floor was rolling away, like a sliding door. Bristowe was retreating to the farther end, waiting till the ground should be taken from under his feet and precipitate him into the depths into which Quinton Chalmers was falling.

Below them was a furnace and a huge crucible or melting pot, filled with molten metal, and round about were several presses and machines. Quinton was falling straight over the seething mass of metal, which seemed waiting to receive him and enfold him in its boiling embrace. A horrible death! Small wonder that even so brave a man as Quinton Chalmers should cry aloud for help!

But simultaneously with the cry that was wrenched from him, the young man tried a trick which he had performed at the gymnasium; he gave himself a quick jerk, turned a half somersault, and came to the ground on his feet right by the side of the cauldron of death.

The force of the impact when he touched the ground threw him forward into the arms of one of the three men who had stood below, calmly watching the impending destruction of a fellow-creature—watching calmly because they had deliberately planned it.

"Settle him!" cried another. "He knows too much, and if he goes we shall all be lagged!"

The three of them seized Quinton, who struggled powerfully with them, so that they could not keep him under control.

"Knock him on the head!" cried one with an oath, and the man addressed released his hold of Quinton in order to obey the order.

He raised a bar of lead and swung it over his head, but it was caught from behind by someone who swung on it and thus tumbled the ruffian over. Then a girl ran forward and rained blows on the faces of Quinton's assailants with her small fists.

"Let him go!" she cried. "Oh, Quinton, they will kill you!"

"I'm coming!" screamed a strident voice from above.

Bristowe had been saved because the floor did not roll away entirely. He had walked along a very narrow ridge of wood with the agility of a cat and had reached an upright ladder, which he was now descending in double quick time.

"You here, Millie!" cried Quinton in the midst of his struggles, and he redoubled his efforts to get rid of his opponents.

Bristowe was on the scene a moment later, and the third ruffian rejoined the fray. He found that it took him all his time to deal with Millie, who clung to him in order to prevent him from taking part in the fight between the four men.

Bristowe was not strong enough to do much more than create a diversion.

He was soon toppled over, but the diversion gave Quinton Chalmers his chance. He contrived to get free for a few seconds, just in time enough to seize a bar of metal. He dealt one ruffian a severe blow, stretching him senseless at the moment that the other struck Bristowe to the ground.

With a cry of rage, Chalmers went for this fellow, who turned tail and ran. Millie's opponent also considered it good policy to run, and the lovers were left to themselves, for Bristowe was dazed and lay motionless.

"Millie, dear," exclaimed Quinton, folding her in his arms and kissing her.

"We must not stay, Quinton! They will kill us! I know that they intended to kill that poor man this evening, but I could not get away to secure help. Then they found that someone had got into the room above, and they resolved to kill both. Oh, Quinton, I did not dream that it was you! But come, come! Oh, how shall we get out!"

Bristowe was struggling to his feet; he had not recognised his daughter and she did not know him.

"What a strange reunion!" Quinton Chalmers, notwithstanding the peril of their position, could not help uttering this remark. "If we venture through that door," he added, "we may be shot down! Can we get through that hole in the roof?"

"Easily!" exclaimed Bristowe joyfully, much to Quinton's surprise. "See this ladder straight against the wall? I came down it, you know. It's a double one; half will slide up above the other and that will take us to the roof!"

"Hurrah!" cried Chalmers. "We can use their own appliances for our convenience. Up with it!"

He pushed the movable half upwards, mounting the rungs of the fixed half for that purpose. He got on the roof and made the hole larger, after which Millie ascended, followed by Bristowe, who had secured the lower door.

It was comparatively easy to get to the top of the wall, but the difficulty came in getting down to the ground. Chalmers went first, clinging to almost nothing till he had only a twelve feet drop and then he let go.

He held out his arms to catch Millie, who bravely trusted herself to her lover and was caught in his arms. It was a rude shock for both, but no injuries were sustained. Bristowe followed, and Chalmers contrived to break his fall, but this exploit resulted in a sprained ankle.

"You go and leave me!" he said resignedly. "You must not be caught!"

"You must hobble along on one foot till we get away!" declared Chalmers. "Once near a habitation, we can send for a force of men to trap those scoundrels."

"I will run for help!" said Millie decisively. "I cannot fight, so I must act as messenger. I hope, though, that I shan't meet them on my way."

The coiners were heard coming just then, but before they arrived Millie reappeared with a small rescue party, and the coiners knew that their game was up.

The rescuers considered that they were not strong enough to attack the citadel of the coiners, so they helped our three friends to find a refuge and then sent for a strong force of police and labourers.

While they were doing their wholesome work, Millie was telling why she had gone off so suddenly.

"I had the offer of a good situation," she explained, "and I was to go at once. I packed hastily and went with the lady, intending to write you. I have written since, but I now know that my letters were intercepted. I found that I was being made a dupe in various ways for passing bad money and I decided to leave. The lady would not let me go; I was kept in the grounds, and only this morning I found that coining was being carried on down there in an extensive manner. How cruel they have been to that poor man! I wonder who he is?"

It was on the following morning that Quinton took his sweetheart to see the late prisoner; he had been bathed, his hair and beard cut, and a general transformation effected.

The reunion was a touching one, and Chalmers left father and daughter to themselves.

"The ways of Fate are not to be fathomed!" observed Chalmers that evening. "I was down on my luck and came this way, guided—who shall say?—by the Divinity that shapes our ends! And we three, separated and lost to one another, are brought together by the strange appearance of an arm in the wall!"

H. Bramley.

(*Turn on now to page 656.*)

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Angela's Way.

Telling of a Soldier's Wooing.

The Spring sun shone brightly on the silver of Dr. Hayward's well-furnished breakfast table in his house at the Naval Hospital at Haslar, where he sat with his wife, daughter, and a friend of the latter.

The doctor himself, an elderly man with a grey, torpedo-cut naval beard was engrossed in the newspaper; his wife, a timid-looking woman, with traces of a delicate style of beauty, sat opposite him dispensing the tea and coffee; his daughter Kitty, a lively and decidedly pretty girl, was on one side, and her friend Angela Middleton, in half mourning, was on the other.

Angela Middleton was tall, with a perfectly-proportioned figure, a dark, oval face, clear cut features, and the dreamy eyes of an enthusiast, which, however, only served to soften the look of decision about her mouth and chin.

She had reached the age of twenty-five, was the possessor of a considerable fortune, and had been her own mistress since girlhood, for her mother had always been more or less of an invalid.

At nine the doctor threw down his newspaper.

"Would you girls like to go round the hospital with me this afternoon? I shall not be very busy, and could show you round the most interesting parts."

"What do you say, Angela?" said Kitty. "Would you like to go?"

"Thank you very much, Dr. Hayward," answered Angela. "I am very interested in everything that is being done for our soldiers and sailors. I wish I had been free to do some nursing when the war began."

"Some of the soldiers we have here have been pretty well knocked about," said the doctor. "It is wonderful what they go through and yet often recover. In some cases though, where it seems they have only a living death before them, one would almost wish that the shot had done for them at once. Well, good-bye, I'll see you later," and the good doctor left the room.

Kitty looked sober for once, and then said:

"I know Dad was thinking of that poor Captain Graham, of the Blue Marines. It is dreadfully sad for him. He lies so still and patient, Dad says; never complaining, though surely death would be preferable to the life that is before him."

"What is the matter with him?" asked Angela.

"Oh, I don't understand it properly, but I believe he got a shot in his back—or perhaps it was a shell; at any rate a splinter or something is pressing on the spinal cord, and he is paralysed, besides suffering horribly at times."

"But can't they get it out?"

"You see, my dear," said Mrs. Hayward, "the poor young man is badly off, and seems to have no relations, and he has got into such a weak state, my husband thinks he would sink under an operation. My husband always says it halves a man's chances of recovery if he has no object for which to live."

"The moral of which is," said Kitty, "'provide yourself with an object' in case of accident. I have several, so if Dad has to perform an operation on me I shall have at least double the chances of recovery of the ordinary staid and proper person like you, my dear Angela."

Early in the afternoon the doctor took the two girls round to view the most interesting features of the hospital, and lastly he said, "Now come along, and see one of my patients. It will cheer him up to see someone—I have got him out here in a sunny corner in his wheeled chair"—and he whisked them out of the building across the square piece of green to the officers' quarters.

"Miss Middleton, this is Captain Graham, of whom you have heard me speak. You know my daughter, Graham?"

"Excuse my rising," said a pleasant voice, "but circumstances over which I have no control make it impossible."

With a heart aching with pity, Angela looked at this wreck of a once strong and healthy man. The finely-modelled head covered with close-cropped, fair, curly hair, the bright blue eyes with the wistfulness of pain in their depths, the pale, sunken cheeks, the broad shoulders made for strength, but now only suggesting a massive frame, and, worst of all, the motionless legs, which even under the rug gave a suggestion of death rather than repose.

"And but for that shot," she thought to herself, "he would be walking about like other men, full of the joy of living with which the Springtime fills one's veins."

However, feeling instinctively that pity if shown too openly would gall him, she fell into a discussion of ordinary subjects.

She found him a well-read man, evidently of a thoughtful disposition, and the time passed very quickly as they discovered many points in common.

"Well," said the doctor at last, "I must be off. If you young ladies, however, like to stay and chat a bit I will come and fetch you in time for tea."

So they stayed, and kept up a lively three-cornered conversation for half an hour, at the end of which time Dr. Hayward appeared and bore them off.

"Thank you so much," said the invalid, with a bright smile, "you can't think what good it has done me to see you. It is a bit dull lying here day after day," though, he added quickly, "the doctor is awfully good to me, and often runs in for a little chat."

"Good-bye," said Kitty, with a bright smile and a tender glance of pity which belied her light manner.

"Don't let your temperature go up, and then perhaps Dad will let us come again soon."

"Good-bye," said Angela, giving her hand in her turn. "I am going to look out all the most interesting books I can find and send them to you."

"Not too much of that, young lady," said the doctor. "He is only allowed a little reading because of the strain on his eyes."

At this statement a passion of pity suffused Angela's eyes and they met Graham's for a moment. Then almost hating herself for moving so freely, she turned and went.

Alec Graham had been startled by the look he had seen in her eyes. It seemed to him that for that moment he had seen into her soul, and for the time he forgot his own pain in sympathy for the mental agony he knew she was enduring. He remembered he had felt like that when he witnessed the dumb sufferings of the horses and oxen after a battle.

That night Angela resolved many things in her mind. She had bitterly felt her inaction when war was declared. Her mother was in a dying condition, and could not be left, so she was debarred from going, as so many others did, to care for the wounded and suffering.

She had no brother but one many years older than herself, a bachelor, in the Foreign Office, so she could not even feel she was sending out her dearest to risk his life for his country. She had subscribed largely to all the subscription lists, and felt it was a poor thing compared with what others were doing.

Now for the first time she had come face to face with the sufferings of those who had done what she had longed to do,

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who had fought as she would have done, had she been a man, and all her feelings of pride and grief for the Army in general centered on these cases with which she had personally come in contact.

She determined to remain inactive no longer, and announced her resolution at breakfast next day.

"Doctor, can't I do anything for the poor fellows in your hospital?"

The doctor looked up, and asked abruptly:

"What d'you think you *could* do?"

She faltered a little—

"Could I not read to them? Or write letters for them? Anything to cheer them and make the time pass less heavily."

"Certainly you could, the sick-bay men have not much time for that kind of thing."

"But Joseph, dear," interposed Mrs. Hayward. "Would it be quite right for her—proper, I mean."

"Right—proper," thundered the doctor; "of course it is! It is more—it is a duty. A service that should be offered willingly and not commanded!"

"That's a hit at me," said Kitty in an aside.

"But look here, young woman," said the doctor, drawing his bushy brows together; "if you take it up you must stick to it, at least for the three months you are here, and you must be regular if you are to be any real use. No flying off to tennis parties and entertainments and forgetting all about the poor blue-jackets who are expecting you."

"Indeed I quite understand that," answered Angela, delighted that the doctor took up her idea so readily. "I would rather do that than go about amusing myself."

The doctor was a man of determination and liked to go straight ahead once a course had been adopted.

"Well, suppose you come to-day at three. You can then spend two hours in the hospital—or you can come in the morning if you wish, any time after ten."

"Very well," said Angela; "I will begin with the morning, and as I make more friends, I shall be glad to increase my hours."

"Better so than the other way," and the doctor nodded approval.

"I will come too, Dad," said Kitty.

"Don't you think, doctor," said Angela, who was pursuing her own train of thought, "instead of sending Captain Graham those books I might take them and read to him? You said he must spare his eyes."

"Certainly, my dear, an excellent idea!"

"But, Joseph," put in Mrs. Hayward timidly.

"My dear woman, Captain Graham is completely paralysed in the lower half of his body, and if he goes on as he is doing now, he has not six months to live," said the doctor emphatically. "Anything that can be done to alleviate the suffering of those six months ought to be done, let Mrs. Grundy say what she will."

At this announcement of the fate in store for the poor young fellow, silence fell on the group until the doctor had found his cap and prepared to depart.

"Then Kitty and I will come over at eleven, and perhaps we may ask for you, if you can spare the time to introduce us to some of your patients.

"Certainly ask for me; I shall be somewhere about—Good-bye for the present," and he was off.

The morning visit was fairly successful though Angela found it a little difficult to shake off her shyness in spite of her earnestness, but there was no shyness about Kitty who knew many of them already, and could ask after their mothers, sweethearts, and wives in a way which soon put them at their ease also.

The visit to Captain Graham was an unmixed success, he was so unfeignedly glad to see them and looked so much brighter and better when they left, that Dr. Hayward congratulated them in his gruff manner when he came in later to take them back with him.

This was the beginning of many happy days for Angela, who at last had found an outlet for the love and sympathy with which she was always overflowing for the weak and suffering.

Day by day, however, the hour spent with Captain Graham became more precious to her, as they grew more intimate and she learnt more of him and his life.

She learnt how alone he was in the world and her heart went out for his loneliness all the more that her own mother's recent death had left her in similar condition. The loneliness that has no one whose thought answers your thought, whose heart responds to your heart.

He was the only child of an only child; his mother's relations, who were highly connected, had been offended at her marriage to a penniless young officer and had ceased to have any communication with her for some time before her husband died and left her virtually friendless.

All this he told her by degrees and then as they grew more intimate she learnt how his mother had pinched and saved that he might follow his father's profession; and how she had bravely sent him from her with her blessing though her heart was breaking.

How it had only needed for her to see his name, placed by mistake among the killed at Graspan, for her frail body, weakened by much suffering and actual privation, to sink under the shock. Now when he was brought home the wreck that he was, feeling she at least would rejoice over him, it was only to learn that she was already buried.

"I ought really to have been killed, Miss Middleton. It is always a mistake for a dead man to come to life, and when it is to such a life as this, why, it was hardly worth the trouble, was it?" he said rather bitterly.

"Don't talk like that, Captain Graham," said Angela brokenly; "I can't bear it."

"Pardon me," he said with a look of distress; "I am a brute. I forgot how much you feel for all the poor fellows who have been hit. Let us read and forget this miserable personality."

Angela took up the book they had been reading and continued reading aloud and discussing the points that arose until it was time for her to go back for tea.

Two months of Angela's stay with the Haywards passed in this manner and her visits to the hospital were continued with the greatest regularity. Kitty was somewhat spasmodic in her attendance but Angela never missed a day.

One evening Mrs. Hayward remarked.

"I think my dear Angela, it would be as well if you did not go to visit Captain Graham any more, at least for the present."

"Why?" asked Angela in a low tone.

"People are—people are talking."

Angela flushed the slow, painful flush of a dark complexion, and then turned very pale.

"What do they say?"

"Oh," answered Mrs. Hayward awkwardly. "You know the kind of things people say—when—whenever they have a chance——"

"Yes, of course," broke in Kitty tempestuously; "we know the kind of thing—Goes every day to read to Captain Graham—How very extraordinary. It is not even as though she were a relative—only the merest acquaintance—still, he is a handsome young man, my dear, in spite of his being a cripple, and some girls—Faugh! I know them! They make me sick. The horrid cats!" And the last word was brought out with extraordinary emphasis.

"Kitty, my dear!" cried her mother in gentle reproof.

"I mean it!" she continued. "Not one of them would cross the road to do a kindness to anyone. So anxious are they not to have to say—'We have done the things we ought not to have done,' that their whole lives consist in leaving 'undone the things they ought to have done.'"

Kitty was the more vehement that she had been aware of these rumours long before they had reached her mother's ears, and had loyally combated them and refused even to speak of them to her friend.

Angela had regained her control and made up her mind.

"I am very sorry," she said quietly; "that people should misjudge me, but I think I am old enough to decide for myself

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and I shall make no difference in my conduct on account of what 'they' say."

"Bravo!" cried Kitty.

"My dear Angela, really! Of course, I cannot insist, but I am sure you are wrong."

"One can only do what one thinks right. It is useless to try to act according to another person's idea of right more especially those of whom one knows nothing."

"It is more useless, Angela," said Mrs. Hayward impatiently, "to attempt to fight against the opinion of the world."

"There can be no wrong in that I have endeavoured to bring a little pleasure into the life of a fellow creature, that I have tried to give him courage to face his life such as it is, and to learn the lesson of his suffering. I know I am a better woman for it," she added in a low tone.

"Of course, we know there is no wrong in it, but still, if it makes people talk—it is not even as if you could marry him—situated as he is, it is an impossibility."

"Mother, how can you!" cried Kitty.

Once more Angela flushed slowly.

"Why?" was all she found strength to utter.

"Why? Of course he would not marry, cripple as he is, and likely to remain an invalid all his life, if he lives at all."

This was the first time the possibility of marrying Captain Graham had presented itself to her mind, and now she saw suddenly where all this intercourse with him had led her.

She knew him as she knew no other person on earth; life, apart from him, would henceforth be of no value and life devoted to his service would be the highest happiness for which she could hope.

Even as this flashed into her mind she said:

"I shall do as I think right."

It was of no use for Mrs. Hayward to argue, Angela was a person of determination and could not be moved. That night Mrs. Hayward told her husband of the matter, and he promised to speak to Angela.

Accordingly the next day he spoke to Angela, but did not succeed in altering her resolution, in fact, he was so pleased with her determination that he found himself forgetting his *rôle* of mentor and agreeing with her instead of lecturing. However, he saw the best course would be, to plainly put the case to Capt. Graham, and leave him to act as his honour bade him.

"You see, my dear fellow, it's like this. She, for all she thinks she knows the world, does not understand how scandal grows out of nothing, and feeling secure in her innocence, wishes to persist in the course she feels sure is right, but we know, don't we, that not all the righteousness in the world can make up to a woman for a breath of scandal on her good name?"

Poor Capt. Graham was suffering tortures, beads of perspiration stood on his brow, but there was not the slightest doubt in his mind how he ought to act.

"Her brother is her only near relation. I will write to him and put it all before him. I ought to have foreseen this, but it has been Heaven while it lasted."

"My poor fellow," said the compassionate doctor, "I cannot help telling you that I think that there is just a chance of your recovery if you could get strong enough to undergo an operation by Sir William Graves—but it would be kill or cure."

"Don't doctor, it is only bearable if I do not allow myself to think there is any possibility, I dare not let myself imagine for one instant I should be justified in asking such a sacrifice of her."

"No! No! You are right," said the doctor, and wringing his hand with almost painful intensity, he left him.

Alec Graham suffered worse that night than he had ever suffered before, but by the morning light he had steadfastly put from him the temptation of taking advantage of her pity, and the next day he wrote at some length to her brother. The latter part of his letter ran as follows:

"*It cannot be necessary for me to tell you that if I were a whole man, there is no Heaven I should desire beyond winning her love; but as it is, I, a dying—I may say half-dead—man dare not allow myself to consider it.*

"*That she, in her divine pity and nobleness of heart, should have laid herself open to vulgar gossip, does not bear thinking about. Will you put it plainly before her and tell her, as no one not having your authority can do, that her good name is worth more than my broken life, that she must cease her visits to the cripple; tell her, moreover, that he has learnt the lesson she has striven to teach him, he will no longer be content to slip away into death, he will take up his burden and try to bear it.*"

Hugh Middleton was a man of sense and discernment, he knew this was a man to be trusted, and he sighed at the irony of Fate that had put such a brother in-law out of reach.

It was a sensible, but kind and affectionate letter, that reached the wilful Angela, and perhaps she wept over it a little, but reflection had only shown her more plainly the state of her heart and her course of action was decided on.

What she wrote to her brother need not be told. Suffice it that one day Alec Graham received the following from Hugh Middleton:

"My Dear Capt. Graham,—*My sister is of age, and has every right to decide her life for herself. I have, as you asked me, put the case plainly before her, from her reply I gather that she intends to do as she pleases, which, as I have made it a rule never to impose my will upon hers and as I have no legal authority over her, she is quite at liberty to do.*

"*I have learnt at the same time that there is a good chance of your recovery by an operation, and I sincerely hope this may prove to be the case. Anyhow, I have complete confidence in my sister's judgment, and I think she knows best wherein lies her own happiness.*

"*You may rest assured that I shall welcome you as a brother-in-law should you have gained her love.*

"*Yours sincerely,*

"Hugh Middleton."

This last sentence completely took away Alec's breath. He might tell her he loved her! And certainly the letter hinted at the possibility she might not refuse him. With such happiness within his grasp he could conquer any illness—nay, death itself.

An hour or two more and it was all over, he had poured out before her the love of his heart, and she had confessed her happiness was bound up in him. Together they began to talk of the future, and seriously discussed the operation.

"You are not fit for it yet," she said. "I am going to make you strong first. Never before have I thanked God that I have money. My life, my love, and it, are all to combine to make you well, and then after the operation I shall nurse you so carefully that you will soon be quite yourself again."

"My darling! It is not right that you should give so much and I only receive."

"You return it to me a thousand-fold in your love; and, besides, you will be a strong man again in a few years, and then you can do everything for me."

In a day or two her plans were made, and, as usual, she bore down all opposition.

The hospital chaplain married them quietly one day in the presence of her brother and the doctor and his family, and then together they left for the Isle of Wight.

From there she wrote letters radiant with happiness to her brother and her friends, telling of her husband's rapid improvement in health.

At the end of six months Dr. Hayward paid them a visit, and declared Alec fit to bear the journey and undergo the operation. The operation was completely successful, but for some weeks they passed through a very anxious time, though Angela never once lost hope.

It seemed to her that love would give him strength to win through. And so it turned out in the end, for he regained the use of his limbs and in a few years was able to walk about like other men.

Every one says that the perfect love and trust between them is beautiful to behold, and certainly they are completely happy.

L. Hughes.

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THE LAST CONFESSION.

Confessions of a Self-made Girl

The writer of these Confessions relates in this series of articles the true story of her life, from the time when she left Cornwall, an unsophisticated but ambitious girl, until she made her name and fortune. Her name is well known to you.

[*For the purposes of these Confessions I am calling myself Maud Cardew, as my real name is too well known for me to wish to make the story of my life public in this manner.*]

The Principals in the Story.

MAUD CARDEW.—The self-made girl.

HON. ROBERT LESTRANGE. (Commonly known as Bobbie.)
REGINALD (DI) NORTHCOTE.
} Men who had helped her to come to London and befriended her on her arrival.

All Comes Right in the End.

October 27th.

YES, Nellie Mateson did know. She guessed it that day at the garden party.

Last night she came and talked to me about it, and I shall always love her for speaking out as she did. It seems she has been waiting her opportunity for some time, but was always afraid I was not well enough, or would be offended. I have been suffering terribly from headaches, and last night, when St. Aubyn went out after sitting with me all the afternoon, I suddenly felt desperate and said to her:

"Don't let him come back. I can bear it best alone."

"Very well, dear," she said; "I will get Fred to persuade him to play billiards, and stay with you myself."

I did not open my eyes when she came back, as I wanted her to think I was asleep. I was too wretched to talk, or to listen to sympathy. I felt vaguely things could not go on as they were, and yet I felt too ill to act.

When I looked up presently, she was sitting on the low window-sill watching me with grave, questioning eyes. She came forward at once, and asked me if my head was any easier, and I was obliged to confess that it was.

"I'm so glad," she said, "because I want to talk to you," and then she seated herself close beside me.

"You know, Maud," she began; "you are not making any satisfactory progress at all, and I, for one, can't help thinking some external cause is keeping you back. I have been with you a great deal during these five weeks, and it did not take me long to discover you were not happy."

"Did I rave?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes, dear, but you need not be anxious—you did not tell any secrets. Only you are not happy, and I think I know why."

I waited for her to go on, and looking up at me with her clear eyes she said:

"You do not love St. Aubyn."

I closed my eyes and made no reply.

"If I am right, Maud," she said; "I will not let you marry him."

She paused, then ran on in a slightly strained voice:

"I have grown very fond of you since you came to stay with us here, and I am not going to let you make the mistake I made if I can help it."

I opened my eyes again, and looked at her curiously.

"I'll tell you my story, Maud, and then you'll understand. I was only a governess when I met Colonel Mateson, and I was practically engaged to a young estate-agent I had known a long time. There was nothing actually settled, because he was so poor, but we were very much in love with each other and meant to marry some day.

"Then Colonel Mateson came to stay at the house where I was governess, and fell in love with me. I would not listen to him at first for Harry's sake, but—well—I hated teaching, and in the end he talked me round.

"I had an awful struggle, because I knew I loved Harry the best—but there were the years of waiting, when I should have to teach all the time, and feel my best days slipping past. Colonel Mateson was rich, and could give me a position as well as a good home—and when you have been snubbed as a governess, you think that is worth so much more than it is."

She walked to the window, and stood looking out before she went on:

"I daresay I should have been all right if it hadn't been for Harry," she said, "because then I should have loved Colonel Mateson more, but as it was, it just made all the difference.

"I enjoyed the novelty and the freedom, and the gaiety for a year or two, and then I began to tire of it. One cannot realise beforehand how it can grow to pall. It gets so stale after a time, if there is nothing besides; unless you happen to be born with a consuming desire to dress better, and entertain better than your next-door neighbour.

"I am not like that, neither are you. I daresay you have been a little dazzled at the idea of being a duchess, but, believe me, Maud, the game isn't worth the candle if you don't love the Duke."

She looked at me strangely a moment.

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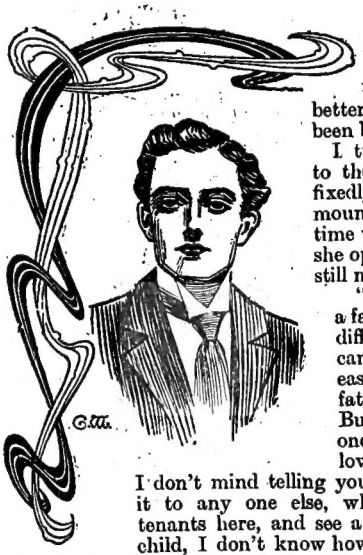

"If you love someone else better," she finished; "it will probably be better that you had never been born."

I turned my eyes away to the window, and gazed fixedly on the distant mountains, and for a long time we were silent. Then she opened her heart to me still more.

"Of course, if one has a family it may make a difference," she said; "I can imagine one could easily give the best to the father of one's children. But if there are none, one needs all the more love to make up for it. I don't mind telling you, but I wouldn't own it to any one else, when I go among the tenants here, and see a mother with her first child, I don't know how to bear it. I'd be a governess again to-morrow, if I could end in marrying Harry, and being a mother."

I liked her to talk to me, so I said "Go on" faintly, and lay listening.

"It isn't much after all, is it, to be gay and fashionable, when the novelty has worn off? I remember when I was teaching, how I used to envy the Society women who came to the house. Of course, I only saw the surface then—I've seen further now, and I know what it is worth.

"You must have something more if you're going to be happy as well. And while I've been sitting here, I've thought so strongly about you not marrying the Duke if you don't love him. I know it will be horrid to tell him, but it won't be half so bad for either of you, as it may be later on if you marry."

"I don't feel equal to telling him yet," I said at last; "and he is so good to me."

"But you would like to break it off?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered; "I want to."

It was the first time I had confessed it frankly even to myself, but when I had once said it I felt easier.

"Then don't waste time, Maud," she urged. "Tell him this evening. You cannot possibly get any better while you have so much on your mind."

"I don't want to get better," I cried. "I want to die and get away from it all."

"Ah, don't talk like that," she broke in. "You are so young, and there is nothing done that cannot be undone yet. I always think it is rather poor to want to die when one has made a mistake."

"Oh, it's not just that," I ran on; "it's everything. You don't know what a failure I seem to have made of it all."

"Failure?" she echoed. "You, a failure! You are one of the most successful women of the day, and many think the most beautiful."

I lay back with closed eyes. I could not tell her how it all seemed nothing without Di. With him, but so much the more to give.

She went on talking to me, however, and in the end I promised to speak the next morning.

And to-day we had it all out together. I never want such another half hour in my life!

He took it badly—I was afraid he would—and I felt one of the most loathesome creatures on earth. Of course, I deserved it all—I know I did, and yet, I never meant to hurt him. I seem to be always causing someone pain, and yet it isn't that I don't care—I never seem to find it out until it is too late.

Well, it is over now, and he is going to his big game—Oh, I do hope he will soon forget.

January 20th.

What a strange world it is!

Here am I, taking advantage of the bright winter sunshine and a cosy nook, although it is January, actually writing my journal in the very same old keep of the ruined castle, where Bobbie and Di first found me.

Really! I can scarcely believe my own senses.

What is more Bobbie and Di are here, too, at least, close at hand, only there is a lot to relate before I get to that, and I am religiously determined to go on just where I left off.

Well, after St. Aubyn first left me I was rather worse for a time, but I soon began to pick up again, and ten days later Nellie Mateson took me up to London to see a specialist. He tried a fresh treatment altogether for my back, which proved very successful, and I am now nearly all right again.

For some time I did not see or hear anything of Di, which was not very surprising, as I learnt soon afterwards he had gone over to the West of Ireland to spend a few months on a cousin's estate, and try to help him manage his refractory tenants.

Bobbie, meanwhile, was in the South of France with his people, and I missed him very much. One day, however, he came rushing in, in his usual fashion, nearly upsetting Mrs. Mateson altogether in his haste to get to me.

"News, Queenie," he cried. "News! I've been tearing madly about London all the morning looking for you. When I found your flat locked up, I rushed out into the street and asked the first policeman I came across if he knew where Queenie was. He smiled at me indulgently, and murmured something about Colney Hatch.

"Don't tell me she is there!" I cried; "that is too much!" I flew back and asked the porter. He gave me your address, but with the wrong number. He is a fool. I wonder I haven't burst with having to keep my news so long."

"Aren't you going to say 'how d'ye do' to the pretty lady, Bobbie?" I asked him, laughing across to Nellie, who fortunately enjoyed Bobbie's eccentricities quite as much as I did.

"My dear Mrs. Mateson," he exclaimed apologetically; "I—I really didn't see you," and in another minute he was literally hugging her. "It's all this news," he ran on. "It's sizzling inside like—like—well, anything that sizzles."

"You shall have Maud all to yourself at once," Nellie laughed; "and tell her quickly, for I don't want the ceiling off my drawing-room."

The moment we were alone he came and sat on the arm of my chair, and positively gurgling with happiness exclaimed:

"By Jove, Queenie!—she's a clipper."

"Is it a lady or a horse?" I asked.

"A horse!" he repeated scathingly; "I should think not. There, what do you think of that?"—and he produced a large portrait from his breast pocket, and handed it to me.

It was a picture of a charming young girl in a sailor hat and a yachting costume, with a frank, winsome face, and a twinkle in her eyes that looked wholly irresistible. The sight of it seemed to lift an anxiety from my mind, for I had always felt afraid for Bobbie's future.

"She's perfectly charming!" I said. "Do tell me all about it?"

"She's going to be the Honourable Mrs. Robert Alexander Lestrange," he answered proudly. "And that's all that matters."

"I am delighted," I said warmly, "in fact, too glad for words."

For about an hour he entertained me with a detailed account of his courtship from the very beginning, and then broke off suddenly to speak of my affairs.

"I only heard about your engagement being off when I got to London," he said. "What did you do it for?"

"Don't talk about it, Bobbie," I said persuasively, "I've had a bad time in more ways than one, and I want to forget all about it while you are here."

"I wonder if Di knows?" he remarked unheeding.

"Of course he does. It is known all over London!"

"But he doesn't happen to be in London. He's somewhere

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in the wilds of Ireland, fighting tenants with shillalahs, and rotten eggs."

This was news to me, and I could not help showing my interest.

"He cancelled a lot of engagements and went off very suddenly," Bobbie continued, "and no one could imagine what had possessed him. I saw him just before he started and he said he didn't know when he should come back, but possibly not for a long time. He was jolly well down on his luck!" and Bobbie suddenly became very thoughtful.

"You look very seedy," he said presently. "I thought you would have been quite all right by now."

"So I am," I asserted. "I only want a little change to my native air, and then I shall soon be as well as ever I was in my life."

"Do you mean you are going home?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes," I told him, "I'm going to drop Miss Maud Cardew of newspaper fame, and go back to the farm as if I had never been away. I shall probably reappear about March."

"Well, I'm glad you're not going for good," he said. "You've got to help Joan and me to set up an establishment, you know. A sort of doll's house affair, with a docile cook, and a butler I dare ask to hand the bread."

The next week he brought his Joan to see me, and it is no small thing to say I was not in the least disappointed. He came again in the evening to ask me what I thought of her, and I was glad to be able to sing her praises to his heart's content.

But I was very tired and very sad, and after a time Bobbie discovered it, in spite of my efforts.

"Look here, Queenie," he said, in just his old boyish way. "Things have all gone wrong with you, somehow. What's the matter? You're got to tell me all about it."

I tried to prevaricate, but he would have none of it. He came and sat on the arm of my chair, and said:

"You've got to tell me, Queenie. I'm as good as an old married man now, and you can talk to me like a father."

His very sweetness made the tears start to my eyes, and such a lump came in my throat I could not trust myself to speak.

He played with my hair in silence for some time, and then I began again to persuade him that I was only depressed through weakness.

But he would not believe it.

"You are altogether different," he said. "And I'm going to find out what's the matter. Why, there's Di, too, with a face as long as a fiddle, quite forgetting to be sarcastic. I can't make him out any more than you.

"He says good-bye to me, and goes off to Scotland for six weeks, then turns up again in a fortnight for no apparent reason whatever. I asked him a lot of questions about you and the Duke, and he wouldn't tell me anything. Kept changing the subject at once. I never saw Di in such an odd mood before."

He got up and strolled round the room.

"Tell you what!" he exclaimed presently. "I believe he's in love with you all the time, and not Lady Danestone, only why he didn't go in and carry you off when he had the chance, I'm hanged if I know."

"Nonsense, Bobbie!" I asserted. "Di is not a marrying man. He only paid all that attention to Lady Danestone because her husband was such a great friend of his."

"I guess there's more in Di than is dreamt of in our philosophy," he remarked. "Which shows I didn't go to school for nothing," and then he stood looking at me, evidently with some new idea working in his mind.

I did not see him again before I came down here, but I have learnt since, that in the wilds of Galway, Di received the following characteristic letter:

"DEAR OLD CHAP,—*Are you a blind bat, or a blithering idiot, or what? Here's his Grace shown the door, and on his way to play skittles with elephants and natives in some foul swamp, while the queen, after languishing in London for a few weeks, departs for her native air, talking of failures, and life purposes, and all that kind of stuff.*

"*Meanwhile you, the only man in the least likely to hold the key to the riddle, waste time breaking shillalahs over Irish tenants' heads, which don't concern you in the least.*

"*If you've a grain of sense, you'll take my tip and cross to-night—catch the* 10.50 *from Waterloo, and arrive at the farm in time to fix the day before bedtime.*—*Yours,* BOBBIE.

"P.S.—*If you've time to think of anyone else's affairs during the journey, I would suggest the fact that I am going to be married to the best girl in the world* (*bar one, of course*) *next month.*"

Well, Di took Bobbie's tip, and crossed to England that evening, caught the ten-fifty at Waterloo, and walked up to the farm about six o'clock.

It was a glorious moonlight evening, and I was out on the cliffs, enjoying my beloved scenery, and there he sought me.

I saw him coming in the moonlight, recognising his walk instantly, and I stood still amazed, scarcely able to believe my own senses.

Before Di reached me I knew what he had come for, and stood silently while the hour of my joy drew near. There was no need for words or explanation—he looked into my eyes and held out his hands, and I laid mine in them. Then he raised them to his lips.

What followed I have written upon "tablets of stone," and placed them in the "Holy of Holies" of memory, safe guarded for ever from the prying eyes of the world, from all defilement, and from all decay.

It was not until he got Bobbie's letter that he knew my engagement with the Duke had been broken off, and even then he felt he had no reason to suppose I should ever care for him. But he had got to that stage when action of any kind is better than waiting, so he threw caution to the winds and came to try his luck. He told me that directly he got into Cornwall he felt that I was his.

He has been staying at the farm ever since, and we are going to be married very quietly to-morrow at the little church on the cliff. Bobbie has come down to be best man, and, as he puts it, give us a fatherly blessing.

He maintains unblushingly that we owe everything to him, and that but for his marvellous insight, we should both of us have messed up our lives into the most horrible jumble imaginable. Of that I am not able to judge, but I do not in the least mind being indebted to Bobbie for everything. I am quite sure that all my life I shall only love him a little less than Di.

But, looking out over the peace of the waters this morning, I am thinking perhaps there is indeed a kindly hand in Providence, that saves us from ship-wreck in spite of ourselves, and gives us our heart's desire, however little we have deserved it.

Finally, though I shall probably be always envied by the world as the successful actress first, and Society beauty afterwards, to my own heart for evermore my proudest title will be, "Di's Wife."

THE END.

NEXT WEEK

the first instalment of our new serial story will appear. It will be written by

BLANCHE EARDLEY,

whose life story is now appearing in *Pearson's Weekly* in a series of articles called "Tinsel Triumphs."

The title of the new serial will be

"THE BOND BETWEEN,"

and it will hold the attention of readers from start to finish. To prevent disappointment in not being able to get a copy of next week's *Short Stories* when you go for it, tell your newsagent to reserve one for you.

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The Decoy.

How a Girl Broke a Bargain and Won Love.

The room in which Frank Braund worked, and which he called his "laboratory," though it was in fact sitting-room, bed-room, kitchen and all, occupied the whole of the second floor of the premises owned by Ishmael Isaacs, pawnbroker, money-lender, and—anything you please.

Frank found the place convenient in many ways. A young inventor whose inventions will not sell is often in want of a little ready cash, and in such an emergency a friend close at hand is a convenience. Also there had, until lately, come from below never a sound to disturb his thoughts, for Isaacs himself occupied on the first floor that room that had not been turned into a storehouse for all sorts and conditions of unredeemed pledges.

Now, however, there came through the floor the sound of a violin. Frank knit his brows, and threw down his pen impatiently.

How was it possible for any man to make important calculations while that wretched instrument wailed in his ears? That evening made the fourth time within a week that his work had been disturbed. He paced the room angrily.

"It's too bad of Isaacs," he muttered. "I've been here for over a year now, and he has never found it necessary to play that thing before—why should he begin now, just when I am on the point of completing what should be a really good thing? He knows, too, that I am hard at work. Perhaps if I go down and ask him he will leave off."

Frank made for the staircase and was quickly standing outside Isaacs' door.

The playing was really not bad, in fact it was good. Strange that the Jew should not have mentioned that he was master of such a difficult instrument as the violin.

Often when Frank could not work he looked in by special invitation at his landlord's room and spent an hour or so chatting with him. The man could talk, and though he could never like him, this in Frank's eyes covered a multitude of sins, for, like many another hermit, he sometimes found his loneliness more than he could bear.

He listened a little while with his hand on the lock, for when it did not disturb his working hours, he was genuinely fond of music. Then, with a short knock, he entered.

To his intense surprise the occupant of the room was not Isaacs at all, but a tall, dark, handsome girl, apparently about twenty-two years of age.

She had stopped playing as he opened the door and stood, her violin under her chin, and the bow straight down by her side, looking at him questioningly.

"I—I beg your pardon," stammered Frank, "I thought——"

The girl smiled a friendly welcome at him.

"You must be Mr. Braund!" she cried. "Oh, I've disturbed your work! I am so sorry. I will leave off at once."

"No, no, don't do that," answered Frank. "I've done for to-night, really."

"That's not true," said the girl, laying her fiddle and bow in their case. "I am very, very sorry. I tried to play softly because my uncle told me it might disturb you."

"Your uncle?"

"Yes—Mr. Isaacs. I call him that, though we are really not related. I am his sister's step-daughter." She snapped the clasp of the violin-case with a click. "There, Mr. Braund," she cried, "I will worry you no more."

Within Frank's mind there waged a tremendous conflict. He thought of his work, then of the music and of the beautiful girl before him. Then he thought of his work again. That, however, was a long way off, upstairs, whilst the girl and the music were close at hand.

"If I stay," he asked, "will you play for me, Miss—— ?"

"My name is Ruth—Ruth Mabbe. I don't know if it would be right to take you from your work, you know." There was a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

"My work can wait for to-night," said Frank. "Play, Miss Mabbe, please."

Without more ado the girl took her violin from its case again, and, giving a quick glance at the man who sat expectantly watching her, she drew her bow across the strings and began to play some sweet, simple air of Schumann.

Frank listened entranced. Whilst his ears drank in the music his eyes delighted in the graceful, swaying figure of the tall girl in front of him, the long sweep of her bowing arm, and, above all, the beautiful poise of her neck and head bent to cuddle the fiddle deliciously between her bosom and her rounded chin.

Never before in a life given to science had Frank known such pleasure, and when the music ceased he remained quite still watching the girl.

"Well?" she asked at last, returning his gaze with no fear, and yet no suggestion of boldness in her glance.

Frank rose slowly, and came towards her, holding out his hand.

"You play beautifully, beautifully, Miss Mabbe," he said. "May I come and hear you again—soon?"

"Why, yes, of course," she answered. "But you must be sure to let me know if at any time my playing annoys you."

"It will never do that," said Frank earnestly. "Good-night!"

Could Frank have looked through the door that closed behind him, he would have seen the girl dancing quickly round the room with a look of glee in her eyes.

"Caught!" she whispered joyfully. "Caught! Now we will spoil the Egyptians. I wonder what it is that my very dear uncle wants me to find out from this extremely impressionable young man." She sat down and thought.

"It must be of great importance," she continued, "or he would never have so far overcome his miserly ways as to invite me to his house. When he asked me I guessed I was to be used for some purpose, and now I find that I am to be the decoy that is to draw a secret from this poor, handsome fool. Oh, well, it will be fun!"

Ruth was not really heartless, nor was she dishonest,

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but she had always been brought up to consider that money should be gained in the easiest way. Her better feelings had never been educated, and so it was that she regarded her uncle's proposal that she should draw Frank into confidence, and so get at his secret, merely with amusement.

The next evening Frank found himself anxiously awaiting the sound of the playing. Directly the first tones rose to him he stopped his work and went, as he had done the night before, to the room below.

Music did not occupy all their time, for Frank found his new friend a ready listener, and was soon confiding to her his hopes and fears. He told her of his many failures and few small successes in the past, and how much depended on his new invention—an invention that would be a blessing to mankind and at the same time bring him fame and fortune.

The next night and the next, for a week, did Frank stop his experiments and calculations at the first sound of the violin, and taste the pleasures of the companionship which for so many years he had denied himself.

Though Ruth Mabbe always seemed as glad to see him as he to see her, after a while Frank, though unused to reading the moods of the opposite sex, thought he discerned a change in her.

No longer did she appear eager to listen to his talk of his work, but repeatedly tried to draw him from the subject, particularly when he spoke of the invention he was then engaged in perfecting. She was less bright and vivacious than she had been, and once he thought she looked as though she had been crying.

Then there came an evening when the music did not break in upon Frank's study. He tried to continue his work, but found it impossible, for every fibre of his body was strained and expectant of the melody which would summon him to the side of his love.

"His love!" He paced the room, thinking, thinking, thinking.

"Yes, I love her!" he cried to himself. "I, who have nothing in the wide world to offer her." He turned and gazed at the table on which stood the models of his invention. "Yet, if she loves me, she will wait a little, and these, the work of my brain and hands, should count for something."

As his eyes wandered over the many pieces of ingenious mechanism a great purpose took shape in Frank's mind. He determined to tell this girl every detail of this great secret he had guarded and cherished for so long.

She already knew a little, but she must know all—all! Love and absolute trust were all he could give her, and of these he would withhold nothing. When she knew all, he would ask for her love in exchange.

Still there came no sound from the room below, and Frank, burning to make trial of his fate, was quickly outside the door that had so often of late opened to admit him to happiness.

He knocked, and there came no answer.

He knocked again, and bent his ear closer to the panel.

Was that a sob? Yes! Swiftly Frank flung open the door, and there, full length on the couch, her face buried among the cushions, lay Ruth, sobbing as though her heart would break.

Two strides carried Frank across the room, and, kneeling by her side, he attempted to pacify her.

"Ruth, Ruth!" he cried. "What is the matter? Tell me?"

The girl raised her head, and he saw the utter misery in her eyes. Then, with a despairing gesture, she motioned him away.

"What is the matter, Ruth?" asked Frank again.

"You must go away—you must never see me any more," she moaned.

Frank could hide his love no longer. One hand stole up and caressed her hair, and the other covered her tiny hands so tightly clasped in the agony of her grief.

"Ruth, little Ruth, tell me. I love you," he pleaded.

At his words a new fear seemed to add itself to the misery in her eyes. She stared at him for what seemed an eternity. Then she whispered, so low that he could hardly catch the words—

"You—love—me?"

Frank's hand sought hers again.

"With all my heart," he said earnestly. The girl sprang to her feet.

"Ah, no, no, no!" she cried. "You must not! You must not! Go! Go away! You must never see me again?"

"Ruth——"

"No, no! You say you love me. Go, then. You do not know what this means to me."

Frank gazed perplexedly at the girl standing before him with fingers interlaced appealingly. Then he turned slowly on his heel, and went from the room.

Upstairs he tried to reason out Ruth's trouble by going over in his mind all he knew of her; but no satisfactory conclusion could he arrive at. All that was certain was that when he would have told her his love she had implored him to leave her in tones so imperative that he had no choice but to obey, though it had cost him sore.

For an hour he puzzled over her change from happiness to sorrow, and remembered many incidents that told him it had been by no means sudden.

Though she seemed like a companion of years, he had known her but a fortnight, and he was now certain that during at least a week of that time she had been fighting against the sorrow that had at last overwhelmed her.

He saw her again in his mind's eye as she had lain sobbing, and with the vision came a nearly over-mastering desire to go to her and bear her away from her unhappiness.

Downstairs he went under the influence of this desire, and it was only when his hand was on the latch of her door that remembrance of how she had besought him to leave her came to him.

Instead of entering, he turned and went out into the street.

As he walked the grief for her sorrow that had come to him first gradually gave place to a great despair because he had lost her.

"You must never see me again," she had said. Did she mean that? Yes, he could not doubt the dreadful words. Yet see her he must. This strong love so newly born in his heart could not be killed quickly. He would win her yet.

On and on he went, and plan after plan he made and discarded. He had no means of knowing the least way in which he could aid her, and his hope grew less and less as he walked Yet he remained determined.

"No matter at what sacrifice, I will gain her heart," he said at length. "Yes, even though in the gaining I abandon it—my triumph!"

Night fell, and he was still tramping. Weary and footsore he returned to his room.

There on his desk lay a long, fat, blue envelope.

"From Ruth!" he cried, and tore it open. Rapidly he scanned the note that fell out.

"Good-bye," it ran without any greeting. "I shall have gone out of your life when you read these lines. Though I could not tell you to your face, yet it is due to you to know that I am an infamous creature not worth your lightest thought. My presence in the house was a trick, and my behaviour was

Turn on to Page 656.

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the carrying out of a trick, to win from you for my uncle's benefit the secret of your invention.

"From your talk I gleaned but little, but the little you did tell me has enabled me by the aid of stolen visits to your room to piece together the whole of that which you think is known to no one save yourself. If you doubt me, read the inclosed notes which, had I held to my bargain and kept faith with my uncle, would now be in his hands, and not in yours, their rightful owner.

"If you would know why I have done this thing, say it is because association with you has made me a little better than I was when we first met. Forgive me if you can, and rest assured that your secret is as safe now as ever it was. Again, good-bye."

With an exclamation of mingled horror and surprise Frank seized the sheets of notes and read through them wonderingly. Save for a few unimportant details, Ruth had indeed learnt his secret from A to Z, and the evidence was in his hands.

In his hands. Safe! It had been a narrow escape, though, and he would certainly settle with Isaacs for his villainy. Meanwhile he must find Ruth, for all he desired was that she should love him as he did her, and until he could be sure of that even the safety of his invention was as nothing to him. What did it matter that she had been the tool of a thief? She had repented, and love is very forgiving.

Somehow or other this note, so full of a girl's despair, seemed like a messenger of great hope to him.

Frank dashed downstairs. Isaacs must know where his niece had fled. He sought him in the warehouse and the shop. He was in neither place.

The cellar door stood open. There was a chance that the pawnbroker might be there, and downstairs went the seeking, impatient lover.

The cellar staircase led to a passage which ended at another door. Frank was just about to open this when he heard voices and paused.

"Will you tell?" asked a man gruffly. It was Isaacs.

There was no answer, but the listener heard a metallic click and the turning of a rusty screw.

Then came the brutal voice again.

"Will you tell now?"

Again no answer, and again the click and squeaking of the steel screw, followed this time by a low groan—a woman's groan.

With a shout Frank burst open the door.

At the far end of the dimly-lighted cellar he saw Ruth tightly bound to what appeared to be a merchant's copying press. Her thumbs were between the steel plates. By her side, holding the pressure screw, stood Isaacs.

Frank dashed at him, and, with one clean blow, sent him spinning into a corner, where he fell and lay.

Quick as thought he gave the screw a mighty twist and released the tension. Then he tenderly unbound the fainting girl and carried her to her room.

Luckily he had visited the cellar in time, and, though the pain must have been terrible, he could see that the girl had not been seriously injured by the fiend who, had he not been stopped, would doubtless have maimed her for life, or perhaps killed her in his maddened endeavour to wring from her the secret she had determined to hold.

As Frank laid her gently down he kissed her lips, and then her closed eyes. Slowly she opened them.

"My darling, my darling, why did you do this thing for me?" he cried.

"Because I love you, Frank," whispered Ruth. Then, as she felt his strong arms tighten around her, she gave a little sigh of content.

Ernest Herbert.

Little Mary was discovered one day by her mother vigorously applying the oil-can to the kitten's mouth. On being reproved, she replied: "Why, mamma, kitty squeaks so awful when I pull her tail!"

Your Editor Chats.

In reply to readers who have been inquiring whether the first six sentences of the competition, which appeared in *Pearson's Weekly* and *Home Notes*, are as eligible as the lists which have been published in Short Stories, I would say that it was distinctly stated at the time of their appearance that they could be used. The ninth list of sentences will be found on page 655.

This week sees the close of the "Confessions of a Self-made Girl." All who have enjoyed reading them will, I am sure, be interested to hear that Maud Cardew, after all, obtained her heart's desire—to become a duchess. Shortly after her marriage with Di his ducal relative died, and leaving no nearer kinsman than Di, the latter succeeded to the dukedom.

The first story in the series by Winifred Graham appears on page 656. Each of these stories is complete in itself, and I shall be glad to hear from readers whether they prefer a series consisting of complete stories, or one with two or three characters running through it. Send your opinion on a postcard marked "Series."

Next week our new serial will commence. As I told you in our last issue, it is from the pen of Blanche Eardley, the writer of "Tinsel Triumphs" in *Pearson's Weekly*. The title of the story is **"THE BOND BETWEEN."** The writing will be very fresh and crisp, the plot novel, and readers will be impatient to learn the movements of the characters each week.

There is sure to be a run on next Tuesday's Short Stories, so you should give your newsagent early instructions to reserve a copy for you.

Ninepence is not a very large sum to most people, but it is wonderful what a great deal it will do if sent to the Fresh Air Fund. It will pay for a whole day's outing, with plenty to eat and drink, for a city child who has no other opportunity of breathing the fresh country atmosphere. For £8 2s. a party of 200 children, together with the necessary attendants, can go away for a day.

Don't look at the list of subscriptions acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly* and think that it is growing quite big enough without your help. If many other persons had the same thought it would be a bad look-out for the children Send along what you can afford *now* to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. All amounts received will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. Collecting forms will be gladly sent on application to those who prefer that method of helping along a good cause.

Your Editor.

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Cheating the Customs.

The Story of a Chivalrous Man and a Chinese Dog.

THE train looked very full, so full that at the first glance Vere Ashley despaired of finding a seat. After the manner of all Englishmen, it was an operation he liked to perform in leisurely fashion. Choosing his carriage with care, but with shrill-voiced officials screaming "*En voiture, monsieur,*" in accents of indignant astonishment at his laggard steps, Vere had no choice but to select the first carriage that he came across, and he tumbled in headlong, in a confused mass of golf clubs, fishing rod, bag, and portmanteaux.

When his nerves had resumed their usual serenity, and his paraphernalia was disposed of in the rack, he had time to look about him. To his surprise he found that he had entered a compartment that contained only one passenger, a girl—fresh-faced, fair-haired, with an expression of almost beseeching timidity in the large, dark blue eyes that she fixed on him.

Vere returned the glance with interest; he was excessively impressionable, and the idea of this lovely girl as a companion till Calais was reached, was most welcome to him.

"A jolly sight nicer to look at that pretty face than at this rotten landscape," Vere reflected, as he unfolded his newspaper, and, seemingly absorbed in it, peeped over the edge now and again. "She's as pretty as a daisy; wonder why she looks so sad."

The girl, after glancing at him several times in furtive, nervous fashion, now retired behind a book, and Ashley grew interested in his paper. Suddenly, however, a sound smote upon his ear, that made him drop the *Times* in consternation. It was the sound of a sob, uttered by someone in pain; it was repeated again, and Vere looked in alarm at his companion, whose features were still hidden by the book.

"I beg your pardon," Vere said very gently, as a third sob, this time almost rising into a moan, broke the silence, "but—but what is the matter? Can I help you?"

The book fell to the floor; the girl's beautiful eyes gazed tragically into his.

"You—you won't *tell?*" she said in a low voice; "promise me you won't."

"Of course not," said Vere rashly, "I'll be as silent as the grave."

"Then—it's—it's not me, it's—it's—my dog!"

What matter that the grammar was faulty, and that the voice, though musical, betrayed a lack of breeding? Vere only knew that the lips that uttered the "me" were perfect, and that the soft tones had a note of pathos that was infinitely touching.

"Your dog," he said eagerly, "where is the poor little beggar? Don't hide him from me—I love 'em. Let's have it out."

And, with the prettiest of blushes, the girl produced from beneath the seat a small, string-tied hamper, unfastened it, and produced—in a state of indignant, panting, resentment—the ugliest little creature Vere could, with a clear conscience, say he had ever beheld in his life.

"It's one of the Chinese sacred dogs," said the girl with pride, hugging her treasure, who, unable to forget and forgive his imprisonment, showed a passionate desire for freedom. "*Isn't* he a beauty?"

Vere looked in silence at the little creature, who was the colour of castile soap, without a hair upon his body, and truthfulness struggled with the desire to please.

"He's—he's uncommon-looking," he said at length; "so he's a sacred dog, is he? I have a cousin, just back from Pekin, who declares she's got the only specimen in Europe. She'll be horribly disgusted when I tell her I met one on my travels. I was to have gone and seen her at Passy, when I was in Paris, but I had no time. What's the little beggar's name?"

"Chang," said the girl, as she stooped to place the dog beside her on the cushions; "he's a very clever little man, but, oh, I'm so frightened!"

"Why?" asked Vere almost tenderly, "of the dog?"

The fair incognita showed her pearly teeth in a lovely though fleeting smile.

"Oh, no," she answered, "but—one is not allowed to bring dogs into England, you know. There's a law against it, and—and if I'm parted from Chang, it will break my heart."

She threw her arms about the mottled object of her love, and hugged him passionately. Chang, who seemed impervious to affection, remonstrated with a fretful bark, and, wriggling away from her, trotted to the window, to look out with severe, appraising gaze upon the flat scenery.

"And what do you propose to do with him?" demanded Ashley. "You can't smuggle him in his basket through the customs, I'm afraid."

"N-no," said the girl ruefully, "but I must try. I can't stay in Calais."

"If you're found out, you'll be fined," said Vere lightly, "even imprisoned."

But he regretted his jocosity as he saw the look of terror that leapt into the lovely eyes at the last word, and the colour left the pretty face as the girl said falteringly:

"I think I should *die* if I had to leave Chang behind, and so would he, poor little fellow."

"Now I should have said affection was not his strong point," observed Ashley, looking at the dog who, tired of contemplating a landscape that offered so little variety, had left the window and was now facing Vere, "he doesn't seem to care for anyone but himself. He's thirsty, I think, poor little beastie, see how he's panting."

"I've some milk and water for him," said Chang's mistress, and she produced a small bottle of that refreshing liquid, and a doll's saucer; Chang drank with evident satisfaction, showed a disposition to be condescending and frolicsome with Vere when his thirst was assuaged, and then, curling himself into a tight ball, composed himself for sleep.

"He's a jolly little beggar," said Ashley, flattered, as are all true dog-lovers, by the animal's gracious advances, "and I hope most heartily you'll manage to smuggle him into England."

"If only," said the girl wistfully, "he did not hate his basket so. I had great trouble in getting him into this carriage without a guard seeing him, and I know he'll squeak on board if I take him down below, and I'm such a wretched sailor, I daren't stay on deck."

"It's very awkward," said Ashley sympathetically; "can't you hide him under your coat?"

The girl looked at him with an eager expression, opened her lips as though about to speak, hesitated for an instant, then:

"*My* coat isn't big enough," she said softly, "but—but

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yours is, and—and such lovely large pockets; Chang could get into one of them, and be quite safe and happy."

"I daresay," replied Vere rather grimly, "but should I be either? That is a question that rather interests me, I confess."

"Oh," said his companion piteously, with a break as of fast-conquering tears in her voice, "if you would only help me in this, I'd never never, forget you. I could never thank you enough. You don't know what Chang is to me; it will break my heart if I am parted from him."

Tears won the day, filling the beautiful eyes and coursing down the rounded cheeks. Some women have the power of weeping without nose and eyes becoming pink and swollen. Chang's mistress was one of these fortunate beings. Tears only enhanced her loveliness, as they glittered on her long, thick eyelashes, and Vere's heart became as wax before a glowing fire. He hated saying no to anyone, to a woman it was positive torture for him to have to utter that crushing word.

He was silent for a little while, whilst the wet blue eyes gazed at him with feverish intreaty in their soft depths. Chang, cause of the emotion, slumbered peacefully, only now and again giving strange little falsetto barks, as he disputed a dream-bone with a dream-dog.

"You'll help me?" the girl said imploringly; "oh, it seems to me as—as though you had been sent to help me."

Her little ungloved hand fluttered towards him till it found a resting-place on his arm; the touch of those clinging, slender fingers did away with Vere's small stock of prudence.

"I'll do anything you like," he said hastily, "anything—if you won't cry any more."

"Cry," said the girl joyfully, "why I could laugh, I'm so relieved and happy. You know Chang is worth a thousand pounds. I don't dread arriving at Calais as I did; here we are"—as the train steamed into the station—"quick, take up Chang, and he'll be as good as gold under your coat. He'll sleep till London, I know, for once he gets to sleep he doesn't wake for hours."

Obediently Vere took the slumbering Chang, who "snuggled" in under his coat and was soon asleep once more—and followed the girl across the platform to the gangway. Her remark as to the dog's value puzzled him; he wondered vaguely if he looked as guilty as he felt, as he slunk to the most unfrequented spot of the deck, and wished, with deepest ardour, that Dover were already reached.

He saw nothing of Chang's mistress. As the boat at last reached Albion's shores, after what seemed an eternity to Ashley, who had wondered at men's ideas of time when he heard someone saying that the passage had been accomplished in fifty minutes, he looked anxiously around for the girl, but in the crowd it was impossible to distinguish anyone, and, with the slumbering dog beneath his arm, he stepped ashore.

It seemed to him that the most perilous part of his journey was accomplished; he drew a deep breath of relief, when, with awful suddenness, Fate overtook him in the shape of a small fox-terrier, who, though having been several times pressingly requested to retire by the busy porters and officials, kept darting in and out of the crowd with cheerful persistency, and in his skipping to and fro, came into collision with Vere.

The terrier's nose told him what contraband was being smuggled into England, and instantly he set up a shrill volley of protesting barks. Chang awoke from his slumbers and answered back valiantly, thrusting his head from beneath his protecting shield. Vere stood helpless—a convicted breaker of his country's laws.

After one last wild look around for Chang's owner, he resigned himself, and followed the official who took him in charge.

"It's the matter of a fine, I suppose," he said gloomily; "and—what's to become of the dog?"

"I think," answered the man in authority, glancing curiously at Chang; "it's more than that. We had a wire from Paris early this morning, saying that a dog worth a thousand pounds, answering exactly to this description, had disappeared yesterday, and it was thought that the thief would attempt to smuggle it into London. Only—we were told to look out for a woman, as the animal is thought to have been stolen by Mrs. Percy's maid."

In all his healthy life, Vere Ashley never came so near fainting as at that instant; his head swam, he seemed to hear the official's voice as it were from a long distance, and he desperately gripped the table by which he was standing for support.

"Mrs. Percy's my cousin," he said at length, "and—and will you wire to her—saying—the dog's safe—with me—Vere Ashley. That's my name; here's my card."

"How," said the official suspiciously, "did you find the dog?"

Vere was silent. He thought of the blue eyes, the pretty smile, the appealing ways, and he determined not to betray the owner of them. True, she had deceived him, but, still——

The official repeated his question, and Vere looked at him steadily.

"I can say nothing," he said; "only—wire to Mrs. Percy, 14, Avenue Lorraine, Passy, that the dog is found and ask her to come to Dover. I'll remain in custody till then."

And thus, for the first time in his life, did the heir of the house of Ashley become acquainted with a prison cell, and had ample time to ruminate on the cunning of the female sex, till his cousin arrived, tearful, jubilant, to take her recovered treasure back to France and interrogate her cousin.

"How on earth did you find the darling?" she demanded, as they sat in Mrs. Percy's private sitting-room at the Lord Warden—Chang in his adoring mistress' arms. "I didn't know you had ever seen my maid, Preston, who stole the treasure. I suppose you recognised Chang—but how could you—you hadn't seen him?"

"I—I carried him ashore for someone," said Vere slowly, "and—he was discovered."

"Ah," said Mrs. Percy suspiciously; "well, Preston was very pretty. I am in great hopes of finding and prosecuting her. You will be able to describe her as you carried Chang for her."

"But," said Vere, steadily gazing at his cousin, "it was *not* Preston whom I helped—it was——"

"Well?" cried his cousin impatiently.

"A—a man," said Vere, and blue eyes seemed to smile gratefully upon him once more.

Sybil Campbell Lethbridge.

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Complete in Twelve Lists.

BRAND NEW COMPETITION.

Cash Down. *Cash Down.* *Cash Down.*

1st Prize, £50. 2nd Prize, £25. 3rd Prize, £10.

And 25 Gramophones.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below will be found six paragraphs containing the buried names of Railway Stations in the United Kingdom (or words that sound the same as the names). You must write in the spaces given the names of the Railway Stations so indicated.

No word or part of a word may be used more than once in making up the name of a Railway Station. In the event of the name of a Railway Station occurring more than once in a sentence, it should be underlined and written down each time. In case of more than one person finding the same number of words for each or any sentence, those words containing the largest number of letters will have preference. No name of a Railway Station may be composed of a single letter, either standing by itself or taken from any word in the sentences.

When you have discovered the names of Railway Stations in the sentences, underline (in ink) the words which go to make up the names (or words that sound the same as the names) and then on the line underneath each sentence write (in ink) the correct names of the Railway Stations to be found in each.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to *Bradshaw's Guide*, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or Room Eight, SHORT STORIES, 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The names of the Railway Stations consist of one word or two or more consecutive words, or consecutive parts of one word, or two or more consecutive words.

The first prize of £50 will be given to the Competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £25 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in the order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, cut out the list below and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in SHORT STORIES. The tenth list of sentences will appear next week.

In the event of a tie a further list (or, if necessary, several further lists) of sentences will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

<---------- CUT THROUGH HERE ----------->

EXAMPLE.

The oaks were swaying in the breeze, the cows were grazing peacefully, when out of the park tore a huge black bull.

The Oaks, Sway, Cowes, Grays, Park, Black Bull.

NINTH LIST.

49. That long, dreary road leads to Saint Patrick's Well, the waters of which possess tonic properties.

50. Cards, wine and women stir up more strife than any six greater evils.

51. We are going for a long cruise on my yacht, the *Tal-y-Cafn;* sails will be rigged to save the expense of coal during any light gales.

52. The new coins of King Edward are still scarce, these of Queen Victoria being usually seen.

53. While he was threading a spool of silk he got his hands, for the twentieth time at least, caught in the loom.

54. Bring a penny quickly for the little milk boy; leave that spot on your coat until afterwards.

NAME ..... ADDRESS .....

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Begin reading now.

The Curate's Love Affair.

Being the first of six stories told in the Brighton Express and now related

BY

WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Six men in a railway carriage—six friends.

A cold, cheerless evening, the yellow fog breathing on the window pane without, looking in like an ugly incarnation of influenza and bronchial affections.

"Business was dull to-day—everything flat," declared Mr. Carter, an elderly man with a red face.

"Yes," growled Harford, a rich stockbroker, peering through gold-rimmed pince-nez.

His tone caused Mr. Carter to smile. Harford, for one, had nothing of which to complain.

Stourbridge, a sporting man of emaciated appearance, with clear-cut features and clean-shaven lips and chin, which gave him a keen look as of a wiry greyhound, drew a pack of cards from his coat and began to shuffle them.

"What is it to be to-night?" asked Blount, a faultlessly-attired individual with a Napoleonic imperial—"poker or nap?"

Pitman, a cold-looking man in the far corner, shivered, and thrust his sealskin-gloved hands into the depths of two enormous overcoat pockets.

"Too chilly for cards," he said. "My fingers are nipped already. I couldn't stand it to-night."

Bremner, whose large, dreamy eyes were watering from the fog, placed his feet on a hot-water tin, inhaling the fumes from a gold-tipped cigarette.

"You are quite right, Pitman. It is a mistake this weather."

Mr. Carter agreed, lighting his well-coloured meerschaum; likewise Harford, the stockbroker, who handed Stourbridge one of his large cigars.

"Bremner shall give us a yarn instead," said Pitman. "We must do something to pass the time."

Bremner was celebrated for story-telling. He crossed his legs and folded his hands.

"Do you know the tale of the gipsy Miriam, a wild, unsophisticated creature, who lived in the open air chiefly, and knew not the meaning of the word 'conventionality'? No? Really? Well, it is rather odd."

He paused, and from the look in his eyes his listeners gathered that they were far away from his thoughts, which had wandered to the green lanes and rustic haunts of the gipsy Miriam.

"It was summer," he said at last, with a sigh. "My heroine is difficult to describe—you must have seen her to appreciate the strange loveliness of those sun-bronzed features. Picture a wealth of raven hair, the rich blood coursing through her cheeks; full red lips, exquisitely curved, the figure of a Trilby, unconfined by fashion's inartistic hand and barbarous incasements, eyes that would have set your soul on fire had they been lit with the light of intelligence. As it was they had more the mute appeal of a dumb animal, while her speaking voice was low and sweet enough to have made a fortune on the stage. Conjure up this personality if you can, and Miriam stands amongst us.

"Her home was a dilapidated caravan, sadly in need of a new roof and a fresh coat of paint. The lean horses that were her friends looked unkempt and weary with wayside dust.

"They were feeding on a bank of clover in a solitary spot outside the village of Rover-Ditton, while Miriam sat on the caravan steps, her long, slim hands, bespeckled with brown kisses from old Sol, folded over her knees. There was a wistful, careworn look in her sad, dog-like eyes. It seemed to pierce the blue sky above, and see beyond, yet her mind was down on the earth, inside the caravan. Ignorant in the very midst of civilisation, reared by a coarse and brutal father, she lived a wandering, ignominious life.

"A man in shabby clothing, smoking a clay pipe, and lustily whistling the air of a popular street song, roused Miriam from her reverie.

"She looked down scornfully on the sordid features, pushing back her loose abundance of black hair. Then she held up a warning hand, shaking her head at her father.

"'Stop whistling,' she half hissed, through her crimson lips. 'The child seems worse—didn't I tell yer? I want her to sleep. Begone, and keep the men away. I'm watching.'

"The man gave a grunt of dissatisfaction, and continued, this time in a shriller key that jarred on Miriam, hurting her worse than a blow.

"What did he care if that frail infant lived or died?

"'*You* call yourself a man!' sneered Miriam, roused to indignation.

"'Well, yes, I bet I do. What do you take me for—a tumbler or a pot of gin?'

"He laughed coarsely at his own humour.

"'I believe you want her to die,' continued Miriam in a strained whisper, leaning forward with a fierce expression, her clenched fists hanging limply at her sides. 'You grudge the meat and the broth, the medicine, the milk. Bah! I believe you would rob the poor mite of her blanket if it wasn't so awful hot. But there! what is the good of talking when you're drunk? Ah! yes, I know—everybody knows—and we are not a drinking set, even Tomaso is sober half the year round.'

"The man was silent; he stared at her stupidly.

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"'Who was the cove in a long black coat?' he asked at last. 'I saw you talkin' to 'im about an hour back.'

"'A clergyman,' replied Miriam, tossing her head proudly. 'I fetched the doctor, and he sent him.'

"'What do the parsons want with us?' growled the man. 'I knows 'em—a set of——'

"But something in Miriam's eyes cowed the man, and his sentence remained unfinished.

"Then, after a moment's silence, he muttered under his breath.

"'Well, see he doesn't come again.'

"Miriam glanced anxiously through the open door of the caravan, taking no notice of this remark.

"'D'you 'ear me?' questioned her father.

"'The gentleman was kind,' she replied; 'he is coming here to-night. He gave me some money.'

"'Money! How much, Miriam?'

"The man's eyes sparkled greedily, his face lit up with covetous enthusiasm; he rubbed his hands together and chuckled. He repeated the words eagerly.

"'How much?'

"'Oh, never mind; it's not for you. He thinks very badly of Betty. She has not been properly cared for, she is thin to the bone. It has all been brought on by your drink and my neglect. I wouldn't have her suffer for anything; but I thought her so strong — so hardy!'

"Tears welled into Miriam's dark eyes, but she dashed them aside hastily, as though ashamed of her emotion.

"'Go!' she cried, motioning the man away. 'You're not much credit to our encampment; and here comes the good clergyman. I'll see him alone.'

"Her father leered, and throwing a coin in the air, pointed to it insinuatingly. Then he turned on his heel, and walked away, whistling loudly.

"The sound grated horribly on Miriam's ears, as she strained them to catch a low moan from within and the feverish murmuring of the child in her sleep, as she tossed restlessly from side to side.

"Mr. Eversley, the curate, was a man of singular ideas. He had great resolution, and unlimited faith in his own capacities, without any apparent ostentation. He was eloquent and intellectual, one who would have inevitably become popular had he cared for Society and its shallow, meaningless practices. His romantic nature and love of all things strange or uncommon led him into many peculiar walks of life.

"Religion was his art, and the winning of souls his ambition; the study of human nature his amusement; mankind his pastime. The chief characters in his own little community afforded him, however, but small scope for research or zeal.

"They nearly all came to church; their wants were few, their requirements simple and easily supplied. The population being limited, he declared he knew his parishioners' bodies and souls in a day; thus it was he occasionally neglected the dull routine of district-visiting in Rover-Ditton, and sought out the inmates of the gipsy encampments. Among them the fire of genius, the inspiration of his holy calling, found a field for labour.

"Miriam was a new discovery, halting a moment in her tramp through life within reach of influence that might alter the train of her thoughts, the course of her actions.

"It just suited him, this picturesque caravan, with the wild, untutored girl. Her face was a poem, her soul a riddle, her personality bewildering in its mixture of simplicity and strength.

"She had a will to cow her sodden father, and keep him at bay when he would lay rough hands on the young child she guarded and protected. She was a creature of passion and impulse, knowing nothing of discipline, possessing an intellect as yet unawakened.

She clutched his arms with both hands and started into his eyes. "D'you mean it? Say, d'you really mean it?"

"She watched Mr. Eversley cross the broad green meadow over the way. His figure, erect and tall, stirred a thrill of admiration in Miriam's breast. His candid blue eyes awed her as he advanced; she noticed the setting sun cast a dying ray of light on his golden hair.

"'How is the child this evening?' he asked tenderly, kindly, in his mellow voice, as Miriam pushed back the door of the caravan.

"'Poor mite! how pale and wan she looks,' bending down to lay his broad, cool palm on the hot forehead. 'Are you nursing her alone? Have you no mother?'

"Miriam shook her head mournfully.

"'My mother is dead,' she replied. 'She died a month after Betty was born,' and Miriam crimsoned at the sudden remembrance of her mother's horrible death. The husband had beaten and bruised her in a fit of drunken rage, inflicting injuries from which she never recovered.

"'So you are left to tend the little one? It is a great responsibility.'

"'Yes, and I hardly know anything of children. It is real hard sometimes to do for the best.'

"The child had slumbered again as from sheer exhaustion, and Miriam crept silently out into the red light of the setting sun. Mr. Eversley followed. It was a still, calm evening.

"'You must pray to God, and He will guide you,' said the clergyman, who, doing all things from a spiritual standpoint, considered it his duty to see if this girl knew anything of Christianity.

"He might as well have broached the subject to a heathen.

"Miriam opened her lovely eyes wider, she looked him up and down in a way that might have made less self-conscious men feel awkward and uncomfortable.

"'Oh!' she said, after a moment's hesitation; 'but, you see, we don't care about religion. Father says it's only for the gentry and such folks. I never go inside no churches. I guess there is a devil somewhere, and perhaps a God, just as we hear there's a Queen in England. It don't make any difference to us — we never see her; and if we did, she wouldn't take no notice of us, though she is in the world. And God isn't.'

"He laid his hand on her arm firmly, but not unkindly, though his lips were set, and a pained expression passed over his noble features. He pointed with outstretched fingers to the west.

"'Do you see that flood of glory—*there*—all red and gold and beautiful? Do you see the faint blue above it? Have you noticed the world—the trees and the flowers, that hawthorn on your right, those dog roses to your left, the buttercups at your feet? Now, *who* do you suppose made them all—who fashioned it? Did I? Did you?'

"'Lor', no!' laughed Miriam, as at a huge joke, showing her white teeth, while her eyes sparkled merrily. 'Oh! you are funny, sir!'

"This was the very last effect he had wished his words to have on the girl.

"'Fancy,' he thought, 'if people looked at my pulpit teachings in that light!'

"The sight of her amusement was a tragedy in itself. Here was a girl living sinfully, blindly. It was his duty to reform her.

"She read his disapproval at a glance, and turned to him appealingly, with a look of deep regret, wonderment, perplexity.

"I've said something what's wrong, something as didn't please you,' she cried, in evident distress, her smooth forehead wrinkling, her large eyes saddening.

"'It needed no miracle,' thought Dion Eversley, 'to enlighten her empty mind. She was an unbeliever—a lost sheep in the wilderness—and must be brought back—converted!'

"His imagination, quickened by the luminous resplendency of the summer evening, painted for Miriam's benefit the most vivid word picture. He brought forth before her the eternal presence of a living God, an Unseen Being of infinite mercy; whose Heaven was a land of cloudless day, where white angels dwelt, and crystal streams refreshed the traveller at last.

"Her liquid eyes drank in all he said, though sometimes the low laugh re-echoed again, and the flashing teeth were revealed in an incredulous smile.

"'It is aggravating to hear of Heaven,' Miriam exclaimed, 'when there's little or no chance of my ever getting there! What's t'other place like?'

"'It is the land of the lost,' he answered, and a strange shiver ran over her as he spoke. 'A purgatory of sharpest pain, where spirits are sadly vexed by the remembrance of past pleasure and the despair of future ease.'

"'You'll give me bad dreams to-night! Oh! 'ow father will swear when he gets there! No drink—no smoke—only pain! Ugh!'

"'You must not be alarmed. Perfect love casteth out fear, and you are going to be good.'

"'If it's only love that's wanted to make me better—oh! how I could love!'

"Her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm as she stretched out her hands towards the firmament, as though to grasp something, she knew not what.

"The last rays of scarlet illuminated her face before grey twilight reigned supreme. An artist would have fallen at her feet and kissed them; a poet would have dedicated an inspired lyric to her beauty; but the clergyman traced no copy in her seraphic expression—*he* only saw God!

"They were standing by the bank where the horses grazed.

"'You must come to church and learn to pray,' he said softly. 'The lowest may mingle with the greatest there.'

"'To church!' she cried disdainfully, with one of her ever-ready changes of mood that were characteristic of her. 'Do you think I would leave Betty to die while I went out to enjoy myself? No, I may be wicked, but I ain't bad enough for that; but Tomaso, he might watch her for me. Tomaso is Italian, and plays an organ. He has gone to the village now. They give him pence for the sake of his handsome face and bonny smile.'

"Mr. Eversley remembered at her words an organ man who had come to his house, and, not liking the look of the fellow, he ordered him roughly away. There was a fiendish gleam in the Italian's eyes, and something like command in the tone of his voice, loudly crying out for coppers.

"The clergyman felt deeply grieved for this wild, wayward ignoramus, with her lustrous, yet innocent eyes and sunburnt, oval face.

"He noticed her dark locks stirred by the evening breezes, as if the zephyrs lightly kissed them in passing, because they were beautiful, and she was so young, so tender. She was too lovely a daughter of Eve to spend long years in this godless manner, and being a man (very human), he felt sorry. All things to him were as dross in comparison with sanctity of heart and life. She awoke in him a sublime pity. Such a narrow gulf—a mere thread—divides right and wrong. And here she was, in the first bloom of womanhood, surrounded by temptations, with no one to guide or teach her, only rough men whose coarse tongues blasphemed.

"He shuddered for the girl's soul. 'She must be saved from this Hades,' he said to himself, as, departing, he left Miriam with a silver coin glistening in her hand.

"He meditated long and seriously upon the subject in the solitude of his study, and prayed for that frail craft on the seas of Life while Miriam slept in her caravan by the wayside hedge.

"Day by day the good man came, and she greeted him with gladness, till he told himself, after long converse and exhortation, he had opened the flood-gates of light—she was indeed developing into a Christian.

"It was odd to hear those lips that reviled outside the caravan, and defiled themselves with language picked up from her father, pleading in prayer a moment later over the bedside of the ailing child.

"Mr. Eversley's constant visits were remarked upon by various members of the congregation, for in Rover-Ditton his every movement was chronicled from house to house by the cackling tongues of village gossips.

"At first Mr. Eversley wondered why he went so frequently, and found it pleasant.

"'Miriam's little sister is ill,' he told himself; 'it is only right that I should go. Miriam is ignorant of divine truths; I am guiding her to grace.'

"But it was not till he believed that she had grasped the faith, and that the child had passed from the jaws of death to healthful life, that he dared confess the truth, even to himself.

"Miriam's extraordinary beauty robbed him of his senses. He had found in the lowly maid the goddess of his dreams.

"'She is an angel of loveliness,' he cried to the silent walls as he paced his study feverishly. 'Her very innocence is her charm.'

"If it was difficult to acknowledge his devotion even to himself, how far harder to declare it to the world!

"Had his secret already been whispered abroad, hinted by unguarded tongues, rumoured among his friends, to be scoffed at and derided? Did Miriam, with woman's instinct, guess it, too?

"Already he was attempting the work of moulding her character and fashioning it to his own. Yet those fatal words, which in his soul he most despised, rose to ring in his ears against his will

"'*What will the world say?*'

"Even the bells that chimed for service repeated them incessantly; they were holding him back from Miriam, forcing her from his grasp. Why should they make a coward of him? Why should he be ashamed? And yet—and yet he *was*.

"Surely the Divine Power above that rules all human hearts had destined him to love for some purpose!

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"'What God has created,' he cried, while his voice thrilled with triumph, 'let not men call common or unclean.'

"The inward struggle and natural pride, the shrinking from contempt and ridicule had lasted for a while, and the supercilious curl of the world's lip threatened to wither his passion. But eventually the yearnings of his heart crushed that terror. 'Public opinion' urged him to face it boldly, and Dion Eversley became proud of his choice for its very daring.

"He would make the girl his wife at any cost. Uncultured, unrefined, reared like a wild flower by the roadside, yet to him more precious than the sweetest hothouse bloom.

"'She has fallen upon stony places,' he told himself. 'I will transplant her into an atmosphere of love and holiness. I will snatch this pure being in the innocency of her youth from a den of iniquity, and bear her unscathed from the jaws of sin.'

"His decision once made, Dion sought Miriam, his whole being on fire with the light of a great love, which enthralled and mastered him.

"He found her alone, beautiful and smiling as ever, stretched on the mossy grass like a tired child, carelessly plucking the daisies and clover. From the latter she sucked the honey. Her attitude was all idleness, for she knew not how to be diligent.

"To her lover she was an exquisite picture, the embodiment of all that was graceful and feminine. She had twined a wreath of green leaves and wild flowers playfully in her dark locks, perhaps with some natural instinct to enhance her comeliness, of which she must have been aware had she eyes in her head and ever so small a cracked mirror in the caravan. It would be a sorry and glum world but for these harmless little vanities. The spirit of the Beautiful predominates in poor humanity, raising it at times to the most elevating ecstasy.

"Dion Eversley contemplated Miriam with throbbing pulses and palpitating heart. She snatched at a butterfly as it fluttered past, bruising its fragile wings.

"The rich, sweet fulness of her voice rang out upon the air:

"'Betty, come here, I have caught you something.'

"'Don't call Betty,' he said advancing, and somewhat slyly taking her hand. 'Let it live. We have something better to think about than butterflies.'

"'I suppose you mean my soul,' she cried, looking daringly into his eyes with one of her merriest smiles.

"Something made her pause; it almost took her breath away; while a flush dyed her cheek and neck scarlet as the crimson handkerchief which formed her collar.

"'No, Miriam, dear. To-day I want to talk about your heart. I have taught you many things, and you have listened patiently—gladly. But there is something not gained through learning, but obtained of God. It is sweeter to the taste than honey; it enriches the mind; it is blessed—sublime! Can you tell me what it is?'

"She ceased to pluck the wild honeysuckle in the hedge, her eyes became awe-struck and wistful.

"'Love?' she answered faintly.

"'Yes, Miriam. The greatest thing in the world—love!'

"As he spoke he smoothed back the tossed locks, imprinting a kiss on her forehead, and the kiss finally travelled down till it lost itself in the rosy curves of full sweet lips.

"'Will you be mine—mine for always, darling?" he whispered tenderly.

"The air seemed to grow hot and heavy, the soft wind no longer murmured through the trees, her voice was choked by agitation.

"She clutched his arms with both hands, and stared into his eyes.

"'D'you mean it? Say, d'you really mean it?'

"No words were needed in reply, as he laid her soft cheek against his own, and gathered her to his breast. She remained there passive, on that sweet resting-place—content. A wonderful revelation had come to her. The wild gipsy life was to end, with its hunger and thirst, its dark hours and hardships. The weary traveller was to pass her days in the enjoyment of peace.

"'I am going to ask you, Miriam,' he said slowly, a slight tremble in his voice, 'something you must consider seriously before answering. Being mine means leaving home, friends, your present pursuits and pleasures. The old life must end, and a fresh one commence in a new world. It means a sacrifice for us both—the severing of old ties, old associations. I adore you heart and soul; love will compensate for all I leave. We will go to India together, where I have an opening for work with a mission, and you will grow to help me.'

"'What is India?' she asked simply. 'Is it a place near here where the heathens live?'

"He smiled at her lack of knowledge.

"'I will teach you all that,' he said. 'It is far, far away.'

"'Of course, I might have known. We'll have to get clear of this place. But must I leave *all?*"

"A yearning look of supplication crept into her eyes. For a moment she surveyed the caravan in silence, standing in an attitude of unconscious grace. An overwhelming tide of hot colour rushed into her face. Then she shook off the momentary depression. Dion waited for her to speak; she turned to him, but words failed. Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, the girl burst into a fit of uncontrollable merriment.

"The echoes resounded with her hilarity. It was a strange, wild excitement.

"'Oh, it's well,' she cried, 'yes, it's well to be loved by the likes o' you!'

"He soothed her fondly. In a moment she became quiet and grave again.

"With quivering lips she repeated the question: 'Must I leave *all?*"

"'I am afraid, yes.'

"'Oh! but I cannot—I cannot! Won't you let Betty come too? She'll die without me.'

"Dion Eversley had forgotten the child. He was touched by this token of sisterly affection.

"'Will her father let her come with us?' he asked.

"'Lor' bless you, he cares no more for her than for me. You don't know him!'

"'Then we will take poor little Betty, and I will be a father to her, dear.'

"She rewarded him by a quick look of gratitude.

"'When shall we go?' she asked impetuously.

"'The sooner the better; but first we must get the consent of the child's father.'

"An expression of scorn passed over Miriam's features.

"'He will not trouble you,' she replied lightly. 'When Tomaso finds he has lost me, he'll be right glad to be rid of the little 'un too. You've nothing to fear from my husband.'

"As she spoke Dion Eversley's face fell. It was a terrible and ghastly change. The truth dawned upon him in all its hideous reality.

"Miriam had misinterpreted his intentions; *he* had misunderstood *her.*

"Something seemed to swell in his throat, half choking a sudden exclamation:

"'*Your husband!*'

"The tone of his voice, the look on his face, made her eyes swim, her temples throb.

"'Don't turn from me!' she intreated, seizing his hand, and pressing a burning kiss upon it. 'What have I said?'

"He tried to answer, but failed, the shock of this discovery rendering him stunned and speechless.

"Seeing Dion so altered, Miriam fell upon her knees, clenching her hands convulsively together as if in pain, and stifling an agonized sob.

"The gipsy's restless, tempest-tossed heart stood still in terror. Had it lost its prize? Yes. Dion Eversley went to India—alone!"

Bremner paused, the train was steaming into Brighton station.

"I've just hit it off," he said; "that is the end."

"It couldn't be anything else," said Stourbridge. "Poor fellow! I hope it is not true!"

"But it is," said Bremner.

[*Next week: A Narrow Escape.*]

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LOVE'S CROSS-EXAMINATION.

Telling of a Declaration in the Court of Justice.

Mr. Charles Wallis, the rising "junior," walked pensively along Dr. Johnson's Buildings, Temple, till he came to No. 3. He entered, stepping up the stone stairs rather more briskly, and opened a door on the first floor.

This suite of rooms formed his chambers, but he shared them with others. He passed through to his own particular room and threw himself into a comfortable armchair with a sigh of weariness.

"I suppose I shall have to sport chambers entirely on my own if I get on as I appear to have been getting on during the past few months," he soliloquised. His tone was moody—for he had uttered the words half-aloud, and not at all like those of a man who is making a name. "However, that need not be yet, and I may have a drop shortly! But suppose I succeed? Of what use is success to a man when that success will not enable him to get what he wants?"

He glared at a pile of papers on his table and felt like pitching them on the floor.

"I may fairly say that I have earned success," he went on. "I have plodded and tried, but it is a big task to get your chance. My chance has come at last, but it's too late. It ought to have come eighteen months ago; *then* it would have helped me to win Marjorie Renton! Now she is gone, and I cannot enjoy my good fortune by myself and I don't want any other woman!"

There was no mistaking the emphasis with which the last remark was made; it indicated that Wallis had been wholly in love with the girl, and that his love was of that kind which endures, despite the fact that the object of the affection is removed.

The clerk who attended to the three barristers sharing these chambers entered at that moment to report, and while Wallis listened to what the young fellow had to say his thoughts were wandering and he only half understood.

Charles Wallis and Marjorie Renton had been playmates and schoolfellows together away in the home in the north country. At the age of seventeen and fifteen respectively their paths had separated, and Mr. Renton had forbidden any correspondence. He could see what was happening, and he was anxious that his daughter should not tie herself to anyone till she was old enough to know better what she was doing. Further, he wanted a son-in-law whose means were adequate, and that was not the case with Wallis.

"My daughter has been brought up in a certain style. She will want to continue in that style. Wallis can't do it unless he makes some sort of a name or position for himself during the next few years. So, no engagement!" That was the terse way in which Mr. Renton put it.

Charles Wallis was sufficiently well-to-do to enable him to study for the Bar, but he was not possessed of sufficient means to satisfy Mr. Renton; so the old intimacy was interrupted and Wallis set to work to study, first generally, and then specially, and so the years passed away. Wallis' affection for Marjorie increased rather than diminished, and he hoped and believed that it was so with her.

He was called to the Bar, and then came the heartbreaking period of waiting for a brief. It was in the midst of this waiting time that the blow came.

Accepting an invitation from a friend, he met Marjorie, and straightway fell more violently in love than ever. It seemed to him that he had hitherto only been dreaming that he loved this enchanting girl, and that he awoke to the reality.

He saw her courted by all, and a feverish excitement took possession of him. He might lose her if he did not make some move, so he took every opportunity of meeting her and he told her of his love.

Marjorie smiled sympathetically, but there was a commiserating expression on her lovely face which struck a chill in his heart.

"I am afraid it is no use talking like that, Char—Mr. Wallis!" she said lightly. "I have been brought up in luxury, and I should not be happy; that is, I should be an unsuitable wife for a poor man. I am sorry, but——"

He interrupted her vehemently; he never remembered exactly what he said—it was something about love being better than all else, and about his making progress one day in his profession. He remembered well enough, however, the look which she gave him, and that she turned from him with a haughty gesture and left him.

Marjorie Renton had altered; her father's constant preaching about the value of money had warped her mind till she had placed that above all things. She would marry for money, even at the sacrifice of love. Those were the thoughts that ran through Wallis' mind, yet his love for her endured.

"In her own self she is good; this is a veneer which her father has laid upon her true nature!" he had said to himself. "She is lost to me and I fear that she will not be happy in a marriage of that kind, but I shall continue to love the real Marjorie Renton!"

Then he lost sight of her entirely. Mr. Renton, he heard, had sold his estate and gone abroad with his daughter, who was engaged to a wealthy somebody. Thus she was lost to him.

Wallis came back to himself with a start, to find the clerk gone and the packets of papers still on his table. He drew his chair nearer and prepared to study them.

"What did he say?" Wallis asked himself. "Oh, yes Owen and Roberts have sent me a retainer for the plaintiff in—— By Jove! a breach of promise case! Clements *v.* Barton. The plaintiff is a man, and he sues the girl; rather less common that Woman *v.* Man!

"Perhaps he has heard that I was thrown over and thinks that I can take up his case with more feeling! Nonsense! Yet why should Owen and Roberts specially retain me? They have never so honoured me, and Jackson is their favourite junior!"

Wallis did not spend much time in speculating; he would have the brief in due time.

He settled down to the work in front of him and forgot Clements *v.* Barton; but he could not help thinking about it when he had leisure to reflect. Two days later he learnt that he was to conduct the case; there would be no senior counsel, and, as he would doubtless have a bigwig against him, here was another chance for him!

The case promised to be a good one, with plenty of scope for Wallis, and the juniors who shared the chambers with him were envious.

"You're a lucky beggar, Wallis!" declared one. "It would have been better for you if you had been championing the lady, as in that event she would certainly fall in love with you and marry you!"

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"Perhaps she will do that all the same!" growled the other. "It would be just his luck!"

"Get out of this!" cried Wallis irritably. Their envious banter jarred upon his nerves; they did not know his past.

There did not seem to be very much in the case when Wallis came to take it up, but the opportunity it afforded him consisted chiefly in the fact that he would have a good case in opposition to a noted counsel.

Miss Barton was a young woman acting as companion to a wealthy lady. A visitor to the house was Mr. Clements, a middle-aged man of means; he was attracted by the beautiful and charming companion, fell in love with her, and made a proposal, which, as plaintiff alleged, was accepted.

The engagement was to be kept secret for a time, as Miss Barton had agreed to stay with the family for a certain period and did not care to break faith.

Mr. Clements said that the defendant was fond of money, and although she was in love with him, he felt positive of it, yet it must have been really his money that she wanted. This was proved by the fact, which he had since heard, that she was coming into a large sum.

Her coolness towards him coincided with the time when she heard of her good fortune. Plaintiff was heartbroken, and asked for £5,000 damages, more as a punishment for Miss Barton than as a solatium for his own outraged feelings.

It was with these instructions that Wallis went into court on the day of the trial and prepared to open the case for his client. He had not seen Mr. Clements before that time; the plaintiff was a man of rather striking appearance—such a man as might captivate a young and inexperienced woman—but Wallis did not like the face.

It seemed to the barrister that there was cunning in it; other people might not notice it, or be less quick to detect it, but Wallis was a student of human nature.

A sort of fellow-feeling had actuated him till then; this man had been trifled with, as he himself had been, and he would fight his case with all the ability of which he was capable. Now, however, Wallis felt a change of sentiment; he did not like the man and—well, it was not Marjorie's fault that she had thrown him, the briefless barrister, over for a richer man!

"I shall do my best as a point of honour," murmured Wallis, "but I haven't the same heart in it!"

Wallis glanced about for the defendant, but he could not get a good look at her. He fixed upon a woman with a veiled face, who was half-turned from his direction. It was a cold day, the court was chilly, she was rather muffled up.

He opened his side with becoming eloquence, drawing a moving picture of the plaintiff's affection, his joy on being accepted and his grief at being jilted. In spite of himself, Wallis warmed to the work.

He looked defiantly, sternly, in the direction of the defendant—he was sure it was she—as he spoke of Clements having been heartlessly thrown over, about his feelings having been trifled with, and so on. His opening speech won the hearts of the jurymen, and it was with considerable satisfaction that he called the plaintiff and examined him.

When the opposite counsel took the plaintiff in hand for cross-examination the affair began to assume a different complexion. Clements found himself cornered with some awkward questions, for which neither he nor Wallis, especially the latter, was prepared. When that cross-examination was finished, it appeared pretty evident that Clements was an artful individual.

According to the questions and suggestions of the defendant's counsel, Clements was aware that Miss Barton possessed certain shares in a mine which had been regarded as valueless.

Clements learnt that the mine was proving itself to be a good one, and that the shares were likely to be worth a considerable sum; the information was secret—known only to a few "in the swim," like himself—and he determined to marry Miss Barton and gain possession of the scrip.

He haunted Miss Barton against her desire, but she could not get rid of his unwelcome attentions. The supposed proposal and acceptance were a plot. Mr. Clements pressed Miss Barton to marry him, and, on her refusing, he threatened to circulate various falsehoods concerning her.

Finally he brought this action against her; his object was to get money. He thought that she would pay a large sum rather than be dragged into publicity.

If she allowed the case to go to court Clements thought that he would get heavy damages. In short, he would gain money anyhow. As a matter of fact, instead of being a man of means, Clements was an adventurer.

Wallis' re-examination of his client, for the purpose of rehabilitating his character, was not successful. Two other witnesses for the plaintiff were pulled to pieces, and Wallis began to feel annoyed at having had this case handed over to him. Still, he had the chance of heckling the witnesses for the other side.

The defendant's case was opened with ability and assurance by her counsel, but the thunderbolt came when he explained that Barton was an assumed name. Wallis turned his face in the direction of the defendant, and saw that she had taken off her veil. It was just at that moment that her counsel said, "Her real name is Renton, Miss Marjorie Renton!"

With a face as white as death Wallis stared at his lost love, and she dropped her eyes before his gaze. He heard his "learned brother" telling the court how Mr. Renton had failed, and how Miss Renton's ultra-sensitive nature had prompted her, on the death of her father, soon after his failure, to take her mother's maiden name and take up a position as companion in England, her father having died abroad.

The shares were a parcel held by her father; they had not been disposed of for the simple reason that they were considered worse than worthless, as there was always a possibility of "reconstruction" with a call for further capital.

Wallis saw Marjorie rise as she was called by her counsel for examination. He aroused himself to listen to her evidence, but he was convinced that she was speaking the truth. It was his Marjorie, his playmate of old, yet with more grace and her character refined of its dross by the fire of sorrow and adversity.

It was his duty to cross-examine, and he arose unsteadily. He looked her clearly in the eyes, and he saw a frightened expression come into hers. Poor Marjorie! She thought that he would vent his own spite upon her, tearing open the past, revealing her love of money, and her readiness—apparent or real—to sacrifice herself for money. This was a great point in the plaintiff's case.

"Why did you adopt another name?" he asked. He made the inquiry more for his own satisfaction than in the interests of his client.

She looked at him sharply, defiantly; she believed herself in the hands of a man who would use his previous knowledge against her, and revel in the opportunity of humiliating her, if he could, but the look in his eyes sent a strange thrill through her. The defiant expression slowly disappeared, as she replied:

"Pride made me

DON'T MISS THE SERIES WHICH STARTS ON PAGE 656.

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do it! I did not care for my old friends to know that I had become poor."

"You maintain that the plaintiff knew your identity all through—what grounds have you for that opinion?"

"I dropped an old letter addressed to me by my own name, almost the first time I saw him, and I believe he caught sight of the name. In fact, he tried to threaten me vaguely with deception, although he said nothing definite about my identity at any time."

"Is it not a fact," continued Wallis, obeying the dictates of his heart, "that you expressed preference for money rather than love?"

A spasm shook the frame of the defendant. Wallis interjected, with unlawyer-like haste:

"I have no wish to hurt your feelings, Miss Renton!"

"Wallis is ill!" declared a barrister at the table in a whisper to a learned friend. "He is going all to pieces on this case; he began so well, too!"

"I did feel so at one time," responded Marjorie Renton calmly, "but that was long ago, and I have learnt wisdom since then!"

She gazed steadfastly at him as she made this answer, and then her eyes dropped. He understood; it was a penitent confession, intended for him. She had boldly avowed her fault, so that he might believe her, and then humiliation and repentance made her lower her eyes and avoid his ardent look. The crowded court watched and listened with the keenest interest, but the inner meaning of it was lost to them.

"By whom was that old letter written?" asked Wallis, suddenly reverting to a previous reply. It was an inexplicable impulse.

"By an old schoolfellow!"

She shot a glance at him, a timid, appealing glance, and he knew who was meant. She had kept one of his old letters, and had re-read it not so long ago! Had she really discovered that she loved him, after all? He must know it!

"Then I understand that you did not care for the plaintiff, that you never gave him the least encouragement—to put it quite plainly, your affections were centred on someone else?"

He tried to speak calmly, but there was an undertone of pleading in his voice. He was asking the old, old question between man and woman, and asking it under strange, unique conditions. It was love's cross-examination; he waited breathlessly for her reply.

He forgot that she might hesitate to answer, that it was a crucial position for his beloved to be placed in; he thought only of his love, and the possibility of attaining the object of his ardent desires.

"That is all quite true!" declared Marjorie in a tone so low that the judge and jury could scarcely catch it. Just for a brief space she lifted her eyes.

Wallis was exultant; he had no further questions to ask Miss Barton or Renton. It was a marvel that he did not say something which would have benefited the counsel for the defendant rather than the advocate of the plaintiff's cause. He was brought to a sense of his doings by the solicitor acting for Mr. Clements, who during Wallis' cross-examination of the defendant, had been wondering what possessed him to conduct himself in such an extraordinary manner.

"Mr. Clements will go into the witness-box again and contradict some of those statements. Mr. Wallis! I think—er—you are not well—or something! Bother it, man!" he added, still in a whisper, but showing his annoyance very plainly, "you've made a hash of that!"

In any other circumstances Wallis would have retorted angrily at being spoken to in that manner, but he was conscious that there was some truth in it. Nevertheless, he replied with some spirit:

"Clements is a rascal, Mr. Roberts, and I wasn't well informed! I will call him again, but it will result in his getting it hotter than he did before! You say that he requested that I should be briefed for him, and I see why, now!" To himself he said, "He thought I should work against her for revenge; he has got hold of some of the past! Shall I throw the case up?"

Before he could decide on this point he had to listen to other evidence on Marjorie's behalf. He was able to cross-examine the next witnesses with some show of interest; their testimony was not of great importance, but he did his best to bring out the truth, regardless whether it aided Clements or not.

It was with something akin to relief that he heard the foreman of the jury say that they had heard enough. They considered that the plaintiff's case had signally failed, and they wished to return a verdict for the defendant.

The judge decisively concurred, and the plaintiff was mulcted in costs. The case was over.

Wallis went straight back to his chambers. It was likely enough that this case had damaged his reputation to some extent, but he cared little for that.

He was convinced that Marjorie Renton loved him; the scales had fallen from her eyes, and she knew that her heart had been reached by the devoted and enduring love of her old playmate.

As for his reputation, he would make all the circumstances known if need be! He had, perhaps, not done his duty by his client, but that client had tricked him into an action against the girl he loved.

A knock at the door was answered by Wallis himself, as the clerk and his partners were all out. Clements pushed his way in, and shut the door behind him.

"You ruined my case!" he shouted, "and I'll ruin you! I'll make it known that you accepted a brief for me, intending to help her all the time, and——"

In a twinkling the door was open and Clements felt himself gripped by the throat.

"You cur!" cried Wallis furiously. "You tricked me, and I'll throw you into the street!" There was a scuffle.

Three or four barristers, ascending the steps, crouched against the wall as two figures half tumbled down the steps, and then Clements shot from the last of the flight clean into the open, coming to rest on his back.

Certain facts leaked out which saved Wallis' reputation, but while his salvation was being worked out in that direction he was seeking happiness in another.

Finding out Marjorie's address from the solicitors who had been conducting her case, Wallis lost no time in paying her a visit. He was received with open arms and no mention was made of their previous parting.

After talking over old times Wallis put the question which he had for so long desired to put.

"Then you do love me, Marjorie?"

"Yes, Charlie!"

Then, with a happy laugh, "Didn't I tell you so in open court? Oh, Charlie, it was too bad—almost!"

"So it was, sweet, but, you see, I couldn't wait!"

G. Forrester.

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OUR SERIAL.

HELD APART.

The Story of a Strange Double Fraud and its Influence upon some Young Hearts, a Great Name, and a Famous Fortune.

By R. NORMAN SILVER, author of "The Golden Dwarf," "The Daughter of Mystery," etc.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

"This is Very Important."

The detective regarded the war-correspondent inquiringly. Paul Jerome had drawn himself up with a curious military stiffness and his brown features had set ominously.

"Mr. Ussher," he said, "half an hour ago I told you that this man Hartigan was a scoundrel. You asked me for proof, and I doubted whether I could furnish you with what would be considered such. After what we have just learnt, however, I cannot accept the responsibility of deciding upon the point—I fear I have already held my hand too long."

The knot of fishermen about the ex-steward gazed open-mouthed at the speaker. Dennis Hartigan ceased to lean upon them in affected fatigue, and met Paul Jerome's glance with a stare of alarmed ferocity.

"It is known to all of you," pursued the war-correspondent, directing himself to the whole of his auditory, "that on the night he was found stabbed John Davenal had gone out alone with this man. It may not be known to you that, also while out alone with him, his own sister, the blind girl Kit, had a narrow escape from being killed on the level-crossing. Thanks to a good horse, I was able to save her. My opinion at the time was that her brother's conduct could only be that either of a wilful murderer or a despicable coward."

A murmur ran through the listeners and some of them drew away from the ex-steward.

"You are aware, in any case," said Paul Jerome, "that for a time he was suspected in connection with the death of his wife, Lady Tarleton's maid, to whom for years he had been secretly married, and who, of course, was John Davenal's sister. Now, it seems, he goes out in a small boat, and though he is accustomed to the sea and a native of Groudle into the bargain, he upsets the boat in a current and the poor girl is drowned."

The war-correspondent turned to the detective.

"Mr. Ussher," he added, "I told you this fellow was a scoundrel, because, with my own eyes, I had seen him deliberately abandon his blind sister to be killed by an express that, at the minute, was a hundred yards off.

"In the light of his repeated connection with other accidents and violent deaths, I can conceive of but one alternative explanation, that he is a homicidal maniac. Whatever may be the explanation, these coincidences demand investigation, and I refuse to remain passive any longer."

Mr. Ussher stood irresolute. The landlord of the Half Brick had pressed forward, and together with his buxom partner, a potboy, and a maid or two, was paying an absorbed attention.

The fishermen, with Dennis Hartigan in their midst, were evidently awaiting some hint of the detective's attitude towards the dramatic issue raised by Paul Jerome. Irene Tarleton, attracted to the general centre of interest, was moving slowly out of the small sitting-room into the bar.

"Excuse me, sir," said Mr. Ussher, directing himself to the war-correspondent, and drawing meanwhile a surreptitious step nearer the ex-steward, "but do I understand that you accuse this—that you make a definite charge against Hartigan?"

Paul Jerome shrugged his shoulders.

"A private citizen, my dear Ussher," he answered, "does not prosecute in a murder case. That is the duty of the authorities. I content myself with pointing out to you that for the fourth time in a few weeks this fellow is intimately associated with a fatality or threatened fatality to some member of the Davenal family or household. I suppose you don't deny the singularity of the fact."

The detective shook his head and checked his stealthy progress towards the ex-steward.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Jerome," he said, "that I should scarcely be justified in acting as you suggest. Coincidence plays strange tricks: we professionals know that but too well."

Dennis Hartigan smothered a sigh of relief. His lowering, anxious countenance grew viciously insolent, and, elbowing his "rescuers" aside, he came close to the war-correspondent.

"Look here, my blooming amateur," he snarled, "I tumbled to your tricks a while back—I knew you were spying on me for your own purposes. Do you see what you've been doing? Bringing yourself within reach of the law against criminal libel; that's what you've been doing.

"Do you think I'm going to sit still and let you go about playing old Harry with my character? Not me! If Mr. Ussher—who's a clever man and a great London detective—says I've done nothing wrong, that's enough for a thousand pounds damages against you, my beauty."

The war-correspondent folded his arms and his eyes met steadily those of the ex-steward.

"Bring your action," he replied. "I will give Mr. Ussher the address of my solicitors, and you can have all the fight you want. I believe you to be a dangerous and hypocritical scoundrel, and I am willing to back my opinion. The result may help me to understand why this same Moira Davenal, dressed as a diver, should have been seen in an open boat off Groudle breakwater, two or three days ago at twilight."

The shot was a chance one—although the recollection of the strange event to which he had alluded had haunted Paul Jerome with remarkable obstinacy—but it produced a distinct effect upon Hartigan. He paled, and the bullying expression in his vulgar, bloated visage wavered slightly. Certain of the spectators exchanged glances. The ex-steward perceived it and altered his tactics.

"Oh, I've no time to waste on you and your crack-brained notions," he said, "I've barely enough got off with my own life, and it wasn't for want of a helping hand that Moira Davenal lost hers. But she turned silly with fright, and fought me like a tigress. I had to loose her or sink with her."

A little cry interrupted him. Irene Tarleton, standing doubtfully on the fringe of the group, had caught the full meaning of his words. The war-correspondent spun round; he had momentarily forgotten her. She was white and tremulous.

"A thousand pardons," he exclaimed, "I did not realise that you were waiting." She put a hand on his arm.

"How terrible!" she gasped in a whisper. "Moira Davenal drowned! Oh, what—what will Guy do?"

She saw Paul Jerome's bewilderment.

"He—Guy loved her," she added, in the same low, shaking tones; "they were secretly engaged, I think. I only guessed about it the other day. This—this will kill him!"

The war-correspondent drew a deep breath; the situation had gained a new and tragic complication. "I—I wish I had known," he murmured, "it might have saved this."

He bit his lip and passed his hand over his forehead—his

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SERIAL STORY.

brain was in a whirl. The detective came up and spoke to him quietly—the bar was clearing of its occupants.

Mr. Ussher had motioned to the ex-steward, and Dennis Hartigan had vanished without reluctance into the adjoining bar-parlour. Some of the fishermen who had escorted him to the Half Brick entered with him, some hung back.

"Mr. Jerome, sir," observed the detective, with a half-respectful familiarity and touching the brim of his hat by way of a further salutation to Irene; "you made a mistake then. Why not have said all that to me privately, and left me to act?"

The war-correspondent ground his teeth.

"Because you wouldn't have acted, Ussher," he declared; "because I have remained inactive too long already. But enough of this for the present; I have to see Miss Tarleton home. If you will call at the Tower shortly, I will do as I promised regarding the other matter."

Mr. Ussher bowed.

"I am obliged, sir," he said, and with a second salutation to Irene, retreated into the bar-parlour.

The war-correspondent paid the bill for their tea, and ordered the horses.

When they were riding away from the Half Brick—Paul Jerome had mounted the groom's horse and dispatched that functionary home on foot—he drew near to Irene and bent to look ardently into her face.

"My darling," he told her, "I am little better than a bungler. I have been flattering myself upon taking my time in stalking my game, and all the while I have been making this tragedy possible. If I had only accused Hartigan openly of attempting to get the girl Kit killed by that express!"

"Kit!" said Irene, "the little blind girl whom you rescued. But it could not—it could not have been more than an accident."

The war-correspondent's fingers tightened on his rein.

"I saw him," he replied, "stop her upon the level-crossing, walk forward, and pass through the gates, leaving her directly in the path of the train. It was all horribly, diabolically deliberate!"

Irene shivered; Jerome went on with a grim reflectiveness.

"Hartigan pleaded," said the war-correspondent, "that he had lost his nerve, and was prematurely alarmed by the approaching train. But he bore none of the marks of fear, and his anger against me was only too apparent. Some instinct warned me that I had averted a crime. If I had accused him openly it might have prevented this last fatality. Single coincidences are frequently the work of chance, double coincidences are more often the result of a common cause. A genuinely accidental fourfold coincidence is impossible."

"A fourfold coincidence," repeated Irene.

"Fourfold and ghastly," said Jerome; "and its significance is unmistakable. Hartigan has drowned Moira Davenal as he stabbed her father, as he tried to kill his sister, as conceivably, in spite of all that appears to the contrary, he murdered, or was party to the murder of his wife.

"The man is either a calculating fiend with motives to be explained by some fact as yet hidden from us, or he is a homicidal maniac. The murder of his niece shall be the last, as it is the worst of his crimes. I can only hope that you are wrong about Vanbrugh loving the poor girl."

Irene's head drooped.

"We must not deceive ourselves," she answered; "I know Guy well—we have been playmates and companions since childhood. I read his secret as soon as he mentioned her name. He wished me to make friends with her; he praised her to me as a man only praises one woman, the woman he is in love with."

Paul Jerome sighed profoundly.

"Poor—poor fellow!" he exclaimed, and he brought his horse so near to her hack that he could touch her hand that held the reins.

In presence of the shadow that had fallen on their friend he could not speak in words of their own new-found love and happiness. When he did break a long silence it was to refer once more to Guy Vanbrugh.

"Who—who will tell him?" he said. "How will he learn?"

Irene Tarleton started.

"How awful!" she cried. "He will hear of it abruptly and by chance, the shock will be cruel—cruel!"

She checked her hack. "We must ride round by the Close," she added with pathetic resolution. "I will tell him myself. I would give worlds not to have to, but I can do it better than anyone else. I will do it—I must do it."

The war-correspondent assented tenderly. "You shall, my brave, kind darling," he said, and the horses were turned out of the high-road to gain the old manor-house, half shooting box, half modest country-seat, that sheltered Guy Vanbrugh's bachelor establishment.

The storm had ceased, but the sky was still overcast and frowning, and the accumulating raindrops dripped wetly upon them from the trees in the dank avenue as they rode up the ivied and straggling front of the Close.

Together they alighted, and Paul Jerome had raised his hand to pull at the twisted iron bell-handle that hung, a relic of bygone days, at the side of the entrance, when the doors in the cool, flagged porch opened, and Guy Vanbrugh himself appeared. His Norfolk jacket and tweed cap showed that he was sallying forth on foot.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "Seeking shelter? But no, the storm is over, and you are dry. Come in, you are welcome, whatever brings you?"

He stopped, something in their faces chilling him.

"What's wrong," he continued, "you look very glum, and—Irene, you are crying; in Heaven's name what has happened?"

Irene put her arm in his.

"Guy," she said, "I want to speak to you. Mr. Jerome will wait."

The war-correspondent bent his head, looped over his shoulder the reins of the horses, and got out his cigarette-case ostentatiously. But a servant relieved him of his charge, and he was left without the tactful pretext.

Guy Vanbrugh gazed at him troublously.

"Well," he observed, "you are a pair of sphinxes. However, since you will excuse us, Jerome, perhaps Irene will explain in her own fashion."

With a final searching glance at the war-correspondent, he led his cousin out of the hall into a small ante-chamber that gave upon it. Paul Jerome watched them go, then lit a cigarette hastily and began to walk up and down the hall.

The moments passed, and unconsciously he lengthened the extent of his mechanical sentry-go, until one extremity of it carried him near the unclosed door of the ante-chamber into which Guy Vanbrugh and his cousin had retired.

At last, as he reached its threshold, he looked up, and turned swiftly away. He had seen a pathetic picture. Irene stood by a low table, her hand resting on it, her face pale and drawn, and great tears trembling on her lashes. By it sat Guy Vanbrugh, his head hidden on his arms, a hand clasping mutely a hand of hers. In his hour of desolation—bereft as he was of love and happiness—a woman's friendship was sustaining him.

Paul Jerome moved away and sought the open terrace outside the Close. There, after he had smoked innumerable cigarettes, Irene joined him. Her eyes swam as they met his. The war-correspondent helped her to the saddle, and they rode silently home to the Tower.

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

"So We Brought It Here."

"Uncle Edward!"

Edward Stormont paused on the threshold of his library, arrested by the call. It had come from the great staircase hard

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by, and the voice was that of Irene Tarleton. While he hesitated, Irene herself ran down into the hall, darted up to him, thrust open the library door, pushed him gently into the apartment, and followed him, closing the door after her.

"Well, Miss Madcap," said the explorer, as he yielded good-humouredly to this manœuvre, "and what can I do for you this morning?"

Irene drew him to his big chair at the library-table and made him sit down in it.

"Oh, Uncle Edward!" she exclaimed; "do help me."

The explorer stroked his handsome grey beard and put on a judicial air. But his blue eyes twinkled.

"What do you mean by 'help'?" he inquired. "Moral support, advice, consolation, or a leaf out of my cheque-book? You shall have any or all of them, young lady, if they will satisfy you."

His niece flushed at the mention of money.

"You are a brick, uncle," she replied, "but it isn't £. s. d. or consolation we want, and I am afraid we are not in the mood to take advice. But moral support we badly need."

"Indeed!" said Edward Stormont. "And who is 'we'?"

Irene's pink grew red.

"Mr. Jerome and I," she answered.

The explorer laughed out jollily.

"That is how the wind blows, is it?" he retorted. "Well, to what end must I direct my moral support?"

Irene pointed upwards, through the ceiling of the library. The gesture indicated her mother's rooms.

"Mater," she said briefly, "she has always wanted me to marry Guy." At the mention of her cousin's name Irene broke off to sigh. "Of course," she added hastily, not choosing to complicate her own explanation by any reference to Guy Vanbrugh's ill-starred love affair, "Guy and I are good chums, but we have always known that neither of us loved the other, not love with a capital L."

"Yet you do not anticipate," observed Edward Stormont, "that your mother will hail with much enthusiasm the substitution of Jerome for Guy? To be candid, she allowed me recently to perceive that she would not, so you see she is not blind, any more than you. However, what am I to do? I suppose Jerome and you have had the inevitable romantic explanation, and come to a satisfactory understanding?"

"Y—yes," confessed Irene with sudden shyness.

Edward Stormont rose and took her hands in his.

"My heartiest congratulations!" he said. "Jerome is a splendid fellow! You could not have chosen more worthily. I prophesy for you both a rarely happy married life. Jerome is a man to whom I would have esteemed myself fortunate in marrying my own little daughter, had she lived."

Irene threw her arms round the speaker and kissed him frankly.

"Thank you, uncle dear!" she exclaimed.

The explorer returned the salutation with an affectionate gravity.

"And now about your mother?" he pursued. "Does she actually know the position of matters between Jerome and you?"

"That's the trouble," said his niece. "I wouldn't let Paul go and tell her, she would only have insulted him. So this morning I tried to tell her myself. But at the first word she flew into a passion, informed me that, as a prospective heiress and a minor, I was still under her absolute control, and locked me in my room."

"Yet," interpolated Edward Stormont cheerfully, for Irene's face had darkened, and her bosom heaved, "you are here?"

"That was easy enough," intimated Irene, "there is a little dressing-room out of mine, with a borrowed light that opens on to a back landing. I got out that way, found Paul, and held a council of war. Two alternatives presented themselves, to elope, or to appeal to you. I was in favour of eloping before mamma could shut me up more securely!"

She uttered this piece of information with much coolness.

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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She carefully and patiently gave seventeen various remedies a prolonged trial. After taking the sixteenth for a long time she had to admit that she was as bad as when she started with the first. The seventeenth medicine to be tested, however, acted very differently. It was the vegetable preparation known as Bile Beans, and to her delight this well known specific quite cured her. Naturally, the result of the test created considerable discussion in local circles, and the matter reaching the ears of the *Mercury* man, he investigated the case.

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nor did her uncle's fresh burst of laughter disconcert her in the least.

"However," she continued, "Paul persuaded me to give you a trial, and I consented, on condition that I saw you first alone. To tell you the truth, I wasn't sure that I shouldn't have to wheedle you a bit."

With which frank admission Irene went to the door of the library, and opening it, clicked sharply as if she were encouraging a horse. At this signal there was a step in the hall outside, and Paul Jerome entered. The explorer met him with a grim chuckle and an offered hand.

"You are a nice sort of guest, Jerome," he said, "disturbing the peace of a decorous household in this fashion."

The war-correspondent made an apologetic gesture. "I assure you, my dear Stormont," he responded, "that I feel—what I have no doubt I appear to you—a singularly selfish, tactless person. Indeed, I told Miss Tarleton as much when I confessed myself unable to conceal from her any longer the fact that I—— "

"I know," interrupted Edward Stormont, "hearts have a habit of proving stronger than the coolest of judgments, and they are often wiser in the result. Well, I will do what you want me to. I will go and talk to my sister-in-law. Perhaps, having blown off steam in a somewhat unconventional way, she may be more amenable to the sweet influences of diplomacy."

He lingered, studying them with a kindly interest.

"You lucky young beggars," he said, "how happy you must feel! Gather ye roses while ye may—my hands were full of such roses once. I do not complain; I loved and lost, as you may, for even true love does turn the dart of death. But it is something to have loved and been loved!"

The explorer's moved sentences stopped abruptly, and he went out of the library.

Paul Jerome sighed.

"There goes a noble, and a loyal heart, my darling," he exclaimed, "if a man can be said to have a heart who buried it in his wife's grave."

The war-correspondent caught her to him, and clasped her close. "Fate send us better luck than he had," murmured Paul Jerome, "and yet he is right. Nothing can take from us the happiness of having loved."

His arms closed almost convulsively about her; she uttered a little cry, and then smiled.

"What a bear's hug, you stupid darling," she said. "And, besides, you have scratched my hand."

"I am a clumsy fool!" declared the war-correspondent penitently, "but you see, I am not used to making love. I shall learn better manners, I suppose. Let me look at the hand."

He inspected her fingers, the skin had not been broken, but it was grazed in a narrow white streak. The hand had lain against his breast as he clasped her. He felt inquiringly about the pockets of his upper garments for some trifle that might have caused the scratch.

Something attracted his attention, and he searched a vest-pocket, to draw out a scrap of a thick, bent pin, apparently tortoise-shell, and studded on the bend with small stones that might have been turquoises. It had penetrated the rough tweed of his vest and projected in a sharp, irregular point.

"This must be the offender," said Paul Jerome; "now, how on earth did I come by that?"

Irene looked at the fragment. "That is a pretty keepsake," she told him banteringly—"part of a lady's hairpin. Mamma has a set just like it."

Her lover knitted his brows. "I—I seem to remember," he murmured, "picking that up somewhere haphazard. Now where was it?" He gazed dubiously at the broken tortoise-shell-coloured section, with its polished blue stones.

Irene took it from him.

"It is like mamma's," she decided; "I gave her the set myself. Afterwards I was sorry, so many cheap imitations came out."

The war-correspondent lost himself in contemplation. Suddenly he gave vent to a low whistle, and putting a finger and thumb in a vest-pocket, he fished out his match-box. Striking a vesta, he held the bit of pin in the flame. It singed and there was a smell of burning horn.

"It is," he said—"it is genuine; if it were a celluloid imitation it would blaze like tinder."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Irene, puzzled; "what good does it do to know that. What I should like to know is how you got it and why you carry it about with you."

Paul Jerome did not directly answer her. "I picked it up," he intimated slowly, "in Groudle Park and brought it absent-mindedly home. I suppose I must have slipped it into my pocket and forgotten it."

"In Groudle Park," said Irene. "Why, it might, it may be, one of mamma's. Possibly she has lost one."

"Quite possibly," agreed the war-correspondent, and he repossessed himself casually of the piece of pin and pocketed it unostentatiously. Irene had diverted her attention to a clock on the library mantel.

"I wonder how long Uncle Edward will be?" she observed; "the longer he is the more chance there is—if mamma will only listen and argue for a while she may grow sensible. If he stays ten minutes I shall begin to be hopeful."

The estimate was ominous; already the library door was opening to re-admit the explorer. He met their questioning glance with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Beaten in the first round," he reported ruefully; "Irene may both make her bed and lie on it. Her mother will have nothing more to do with her. The law of entail will not allow her actually to disinherit her daughter, but she announces her intention of living as long as she can, and meanwhile expresses the hope that you will, neither of you, under any circumstances, count upon her assistance or recognition."

Irene's lip curled, and she turned to Paul Jerome.

"I told you," she said, "that we might as well elope and have done with it. Uncle Edward," she added, "will you lend us a carriage and allow Mrs. Lintot to get some of my things together?"

The explorer twisted his moustache.

"My dear girl," he replied, "you can't leave us in that fashion. I was only giving you baldly the substance of your mother's views. I did not mean you to take me, or them, too literally. Flight of the sort you suggest might seriously compromise Jerome's reputation, to say nothing of your own."

He stepped a pace nearer Irene and glanced disarmingly into her rebellious countenance.

"If you must decide finally between your mother and your chosen husband," he pursued, "I will see if I cannot find you a suitable home and chaperon pending arrangements for a straightforward, if quiet, wedding. What do you say, Jerome?"

"What can I say, Stormont," answered the war-correspondent, shaking off a certain abstraction, "but that I am profoundly grateful for your kindness and deeply appreciative of your tact. But I may be pardoned for pointing out that Lady Tarleton has already attempted forcibly to restrain Irene's movements, and may do so again. I begin to think that she is a woman of a more unusual type than I had suspected."

Edward Stormont hesitated. "Upon my word, Jerome," he rejoined, "I scarcely know what to say, but I am very far from suggesting that you should withdraw your protection, even temporarily, from Irene. Yet, although my sister-in-law has a rarely strong character and an indomitable will, I should trust that——"

He was interrupted; a servant had entered the room.

"Well?" said the explorer.

The footman came forward into the apartment; he was carrying a flat, rather angular parcel, wrapped in brown paper.

"Two men, sir," he explained, "from Groudle—fishermen, sir, wish to see you with reference to this. I told them you

(*Continued on page* 668.)

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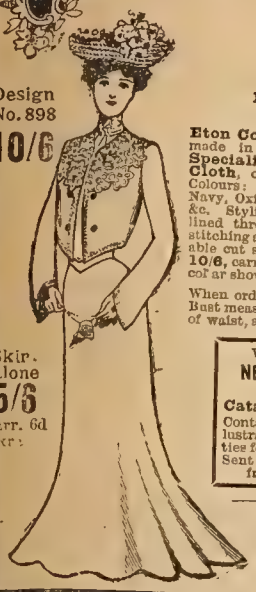

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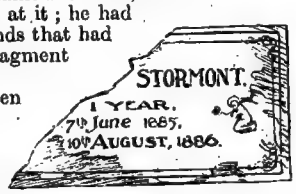
disliked being disturbed in the morning and they consented to allow me to bring it in."

"Put it down, then," directed his master irritably; "I will look at it later on."

"Yes, sir," said the servant; "and are they to have any remuneration, sir?—they spoke of the thing being, they thought, silver."

"Confound it!" exclaimed Edward Stormont; "open it and let us find out what all the fuss is about!"

The man obeyed, and tore off the wrappings. A flat, triangular section of damp wood was revealed. To it was attached a metal plate, also triangular but jagged along one edge. The plate was marked with a name and dates, and read:



The explorer stood looking at it; he had become very pale and the hands that had taken up the damp wooden fragment were twitching.

"June the seventh, eighteen eighty-five," he said; "my little girl's birthday; August the tenth eighty-six, the day she died. What—what is this and where did it come from?"

"I understood, sir," answered the servant, "the men to say that it had been found on the beach, and having your name on it they thought it might interest you."

Edward Stormont took a stride towards the door, but halted. "No," he said, "send the men in." And he waited impatiently till the order was carried out and two burly, bearded figures made their appearance.

The explorer went to meet them.

"Well, my men," he began, "this is a curious find of yours. Did you pick it up yourselves?"

One of the fishermen replied with a motion that indicated his companion.

"My mate did, sir," he said; "it blew heavyish in the night—the thunderstorm having freshened the air, you see—and we was strolling along the edge of the tide this morning, having a look at the drift, sir, when he spots something shiny. He picks it up, and it was that."

"Yes, sir," chimed in his partner, "and though it didn't seem to be of much value, barring that the metal might be silver, it had your name on it, sir. So we brought it here."

The explorer turned the thing over in his hands.

"Cast up by the sea," he muttered; "of all impossible coincidences, this would appear to be the most impossible."

He held out to Paul Jerome the damp, splintered wood and inscribed metal.

"Sixteen years ago," he said, "I saw such a plate upon the lid of my only child's tiny coffin. The words 'Born' and 'Died' and her Christian name are missing, otherwise it might be the same. The dates are correct, and the metal has evidently come from a coffin-plate."

Jerome touched it curiously and Irene also. The coincidence—if coincidence if were—was inexpressibly weird.

"It cannot be the same, however," pursued the explorer, laying the wooden fragment down and brushing the sea-sand from his fingers. "How could that get from the mausoleum in the park to Groudle Bay? No, someone died on the same day as my little Moira—someone who had been born on her birthday and who was called Stormont."

The war-correspondent's gaze fixed like that of one who is mesmerised.

"Moira," he said slowly—'Groudle Bay, the mausoleum—*Good Heavens!*"

Edward Stormont caught him by the elbow.

"Jerome," he cried, "what are you saying—what do you mean?"

Paul Jerome was scarcely conscious of his friend's question. He had taken from his pocket the fragment of turquoise and tortoise-shell. He thrust it back hastily, and, with a kind of shudder, to draw the explorer aside.

"Stormont," he said in a low tone, "do you remember one day when you complained of finding the mausoleum unlocked?"

The explorer started.

"Yes," he answered, "but what—you don't mean—oh, who could be so inhuman as wantonly to desecrate——?"

The war-correspondent checked his excited outburst.

"I don't know what to think," he said: "I have plunged suddenly into the heart of a profound and inexplicable mystery of whose existence I have been for some time cognisant. The only way of fathoming it seems to be——" He broke off. "Unless," he added, "that would be too painful for you?"

"What were you going to say?" demanded Edward Stormont curtly. Jerome encountered his friend's gaze steadily.

"To see," he continued, completing his unfinished observation, "if the mausoleum itself has anything to tell us."

Edward Stormont's bearded jaw set sternly. "You are right," he said, "and if we find that even the sacred slumbers of the dead are not secure from human intrusion, I shall know how to discover and deal with the guilty."

Jerome turned away with a sigh and answered nothing. Stormont got out a sovereign purse, to give the fishermen a gold coin apiece, and dismissed them. Then he came back to Jerome.

"Now," he said, "we will make the investigation you suggest. But what about Irene and your own problems?"

The war-correspondent frowned.

"Perhaps," he responded, "the settlement of the one problem will facilitate the settlement of the other. But as we can hardly allow Irene to accompany us on our present errand, I shall advise her to lock herself in this room. That will prevent any further attempt on Lady Tarleton's part to make a prisoner of her. She need not open until I return, to anybody."

The explorer knitted his brows over the first of these sentences. But Jerome offered no explanation and they passed out of the library together. The war-correspondent stayed a moment without until Irene—scarcely less perplexed than her uncle—had secured the door. This done he went to his room for a hat. The explorer did the same.

They left the Tower by the window of the justice-room. Edward Stormont had guided their steps thither to obtain a great key that hung in a certain cupboard. It was that of the mausoleum.

(To be concluded.)

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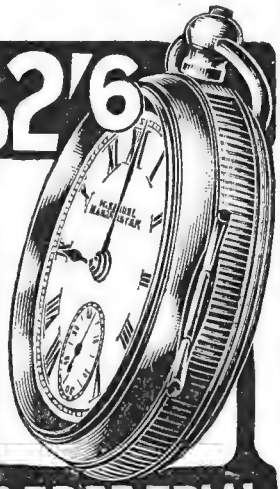

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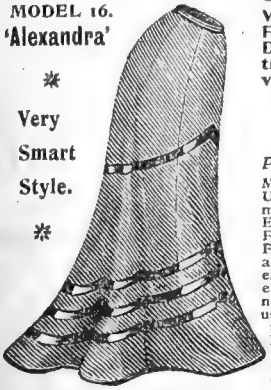

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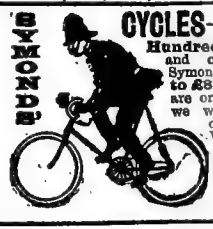

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A Hammock Proposal.

MOLLY: "Jack Peters proposed to me while we were sitting in the hammock." Dolly: "Then you can consider him a net profit."

Only Presents Now.

"So she's really going to be married?" "Yes." "I suppose she thinks of nothing but the future?" "Well, she only talks of the presents."

How It's Kept in Place.

"WHAT is it, do you suppose, that keeps the moon in place, and prevents it from falling?" asked Araminta. "I think it must be the beams," replied Charlie, softly.

Good for Trade.

"YES, George, it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. It is better for the jeweller, and the florist, and the postal system, and sometimes for the lawyers."

Cards Are Out Now!

"How many stars can you see?" she asked. "Two more than you," said he. "How do you make that out?" she asked. "*I* can see your eyes," said he. And that was the beginning of it all.

The Manly Man.

HE: "You say you like a manly man. What is your idea of a manly man?" She: "Well, for instance, one who doesn't stay and stay and stay, just because he knows the girl isn't strong enough to throw him out."

The Fatal Flirtation.

MR. PECK: "What is that book you are reading, my dear?" Mrs. Peck: "It's a novel, entitled 'A Fatal Flirtation,' with such a sad ending." Mr. Peck: "Something like ours, I presume?"

What Did It Mean?

MARIE: "I told papa, Willie, dear, that I thought you were just too lovely for any use." Willie: "And what did he say, darling?" Marie: "He said he feared as much. Now, what could he have meant by that, Willie, dear?"

Wanted the Letter to Go.

"WHAT in the name of Jupiter did you sew up all the pockets in my overcoat for this morning?" "Dearest, that letter I gave you to post was very important, and I intended to make sure you carried it in your hand."

New Use for a Cyclometer.

SUE: "Is this your cyclometer on the mantelpiece?" He: "Yes." She: "Why, it only registers 2! Is that all the miles you have ridden in six months?" He: "Oh, no! I keep that to tell the number of instalments I have paid."

An Impossible Task.

HE: "What would you say if I were to steal a kiss from you?" She: "But that is impossible." He: "Impossible! Why so, pray?" She: "Because you can't steal anything I haven't got, and no one has ever given me a kiss—see?"

How Unkind!

"THIS," said Mr. Flitter, "is a photograph of the only girl I ever loved." "How cleverly," said Miss Wyse, as she looked at the portrait, "they do get up these composite photographs!"

A Dilemma.

SHE (alarmed): "Oh, Tom, why do you make such awful faces at me?" He (contritely): "I can't help it, dear. My eyeglass is falling out, and I don't want to let go of your hands."

He Spoke Feelingly.

"AFTER all," remarked the sentimental wife, "home is the dearest spot on earth." "That's so," replied the practical head of the family, as he finished auditing last month's grocery bill.

She Couldn't Expect it.

HE: "You don't love me as you did before we were married." She: "Of course I don't, John. You wouldn't expect a woman to love a married man as she could a bachelor, would you?"

Found Her Out.

"No, father," the fair girl said, "Mr. Allingham may not be rich, but his heart is in the right place." "Humph!" retorted the crusty old doctor; "you've had your ear against it, eh?"

The Quotation Didn't Apply.

MR. EMPECK: "'There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.'" Mrs. Empeck: "Yes, but you seem to have embarked on it in a leaky old boat with only one oar."

It Would Save 'Bus Fares.

"JOHN, dear, I wish you would get me a brougham." "My darling Amy. Didn't I tell you we must economise?" "Yes, that's why I want the brougham. Think of the omnibus fares I'd save."

They Don't Want Leading.

BLOBBS: "What nonsense it is for newspapers in their accounts of weddings to describe the brides being led to the altar?" Slobbs: "How so?" Blobbs: "Why, most of the girls could find their way in the dark."

The Late Visitor.

MR. STAYLATE: "I hear your mother's step on the stairs, and I shall be able to bid her good-night." Sleepy Beauty (wearily): "It can't be mother. She's a late sleeper. Probably it is the servant coming down to light the fire."

Which of the Six?

"You will marry a tall, dark gentleman," said the fortune-teller, examining the lines on the fair hand. "That doesn't help me at all," despairingly replied the lovely blonde who had called to consult her. "All six of them are tall, dark gentlemen."

Beating About the Bush.

"So you are having your house redecorated, Mr. Hawkins?" "Yes; the workmen began last week." "Are you making radical changes?" "Yes—very." "What is to be the main feature of the new house?" "You—if you'll consent."

She Didn't Want Long.

"GEORGE," she said, in a nervous whisper, "you must give me time—you must give me time." "How long?" he hoarsely asked; "a day, a week, a month, a year?" "No—no, George," and she quickly scanned the sky; "only until the moon gets behind a cloud."

Good Use for Him.

BOBBY (to young Mr. Fatboy): "I heard my sister Clara say something lovely to ma about you, Mr. Fatboy." Young Mr. Fatboy (anxiously): "No; did you, Bobby? What was it?" Bobby: "She said you would be lovely to sit on the big dictionary to press autumn leaves."

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Wants to be an Actress.

So you too, "HAZEL-EYES," have the stage fever. You want to become an actress, do you? You are eighteen, tall, fair, and "plump of figure."

* * * * *

Well, the life of a successful actress is very pleasing to one's vanity, and even a fairly good one has a very good time. But a young lady who is not naturally fond of acting and does not feel that she *must* act, to gratify some instinctive prompting, should leave the stage severely alone. It spoils a woman for domestic life, brings her into contact with a class of people who can do her no good, and often brings her into trouble. So I should not worry myself any more about it, unless you really have some exceptional stage talent. Your friends are the best judges as to that, and I should go by their advice.

A Silly Trick.

"LILY" is suffering from the results of "Strategy for Sweethearts." I am often asked by young men how they can go to work to hurry on marriage with their lady-loves. "LILY'S" young man hit on the following scheme: He is a clerk in an Indian merchant's office, and told "LILY" that he had a chance of going abroad for two or three years for his firm. He asked "LILY" to marry him without the knowledge of his employers, who would think him too young to go to India married. He persuaded "LILY," and went to get a special license.

* * * * *

As "LILY" could not marry without her parents' consent—she is under age—the scheme fell through. Then the young man told "LILY" it was all a trick. He was not going abroad at all, but simply wanted to marry her at once because of his love for her, and could not wait till his position improved. Do I advise "LILY" to break off the engagement?

* * * * *

He acted in a rash way, "LILY," and I never approve of deception, even when love is the cause. He had no business to try to trap you into a premature marriage, and certainly deserves the punishment you threaten. Had you married him, as you say, not only might his own prospects have been ruined, and his chance of advancement gone, but he would have dragged you into trouble with your parents, and perhaps poverty.

* * * * *

Now, I don't advise you to break off with him if you both really love each other, but I think for some time I should let him know how strongly you condemn his deception. Let him have an opportunity to think it over, and make amends by working hard at his business to improve his position. It would be better for him if he could go abroad for two years, as that would make him more useful to his employers. At his age and yours the first consideration is to make a position. You should not stand in his way.

A Young Story Writer.

THE Editor tells me, "Amy," that he will be glad to see your story. It need not be typewritten, provided the writing is quite legible. The length may be anything from one thousand to three thousand words. You should inclose a stamped, addressed envelope for the return of the story if it is not accepted.

Rather Too Young.

"INQUIRER."—Yes, seventeen is rather young, certainly, for a girl to enter into an affair with a young man without her parents' knowledge. You say the young lady and yourself have been going out for five months, in spite of the fact that her parents have forbidden her to speak to young men. You yourself don't know anyone who could introduce you to her parents.

* * * * *

Don't you think you had better postpone further connection with her until she is older? Meanwhile, why not try to get to know her parents by some way or another. Surely the girl has some boy cousins of your own age whom you could get to know, or perhaps she takes part in Church or Sunday-school work, in which you might also join, and strike up a proper acquaintance that way, of which her parents would approve. I cannot advise you to continue a secret friendship with the girl against her parents' wishes, as of course until she is a certain age they are the best judges on her behalf.

Is He in Love?

"HOPEFUL" does not know whether he is in love with a certain girl or whether he is merely fond of her as a friend. He takes her out to theatres and concerts, and both of them enjoy being with each other. When they part "HOPEFUL" feels sad, and he believes she feels the same. He feels he would miss her very much if she were separated from him. What do I advise? He has not yet had the courage to talk to her of his feelings.

* * * * *

If you don't really feel passionately towards her, and do not think of her as the only woman in the world, why trouble yourself as to your feelings? If a man or a woman is in love, really and truly, they don't cast about in their minds, but are only too powerfully aware of the fact. You are evidently very friendly with the girl. Continue to be so, and if later on you think of marriage, and are in a position to become engaged, pop the question and see what happens.

Getting Married.

How soon after your engagement should you begin to arrange the wedding, "ALPHONSE"? Well, you should start at once. First there is the question of means. You know whether you have saved enough to go to work with the first details, such as selecting a house, arranging matters with the landlord, furniture, linen, plate, and other necessaries. In those matters your *fiancée* should be taken into your confidence, as they will affect her more than you in after life.

* * * * *

Of course a good deal must depend on the month of the ceremony and where you will spend the honeymoon. The best time would be June, July, or August, so that you two could spend your summer holiday—if you get one—together. Christmas is rather a bad time, as there are very few places where a married couple would be comfortable at that time of year, seeing that everybody is in the family circle and hotels rather desolate.

* * * * *

One more word—don't hang about your future bride the week or two before the wedding day. She won't be at her best, neither will her parents, and they will have a lot of things to arrange which do not require your aid.

Cynthia

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